



Bob Smith

(Weakley County Press, July 25, 2013, Page One)

Colonel Robert W. "Bob" Smith's African-American View of Martin, Tennessee

By Marvin Downing

On Tuesday, July 23, 2013, Martin and Weakley County lost a beloved African-American promoter of personal, interracial, and community relations. Colonel Robert Wallace "Bob" Smith passed away after an injury. He was a World War II veteran having served in the U.S. Navy Seabees. He was noted for his church and civic work.¹ He was born in Weakley County on March 18, 1925. He worked about 20 years at Brooks Produce in Martin and a comparable span on the UT Martin paint crew. Understandably he actively belonged to the local American Legion unit, according to fellow member Dr. Lonnie Maness; at one point Smith was the University Post 69 Commander. He and his wife

¹ *Dresden Enterprise*, July 31, 2013, p. 1, 6.

Gwen Willoughby Smith worshiped at the Miles Chapel C.M.E. Church. As a Martin Beautiful Committee, an advisory group to the City of Martin, he initiated an Adopt-A-Site flower bed at Miles Chapel and plots honoring his public school teacher Pearl Hayes, his lifelong friend educator Willis Brown, and Charlie Moore, also a much admired African-American elementary school cafeteria cook.²

Downing hopes this article will show that Colonel Bob, so called after the governor made him a Tennessee Colonel in 2003, covered some local history, culture, and interaction of Negroes, Indians, and Caucasians. For some reason he did not permit a UT Martin museum director to make audio recordings though he otherwise readily shared his recollections. Fortunately he put his own thoughts on paper which the *Weakley County Press* of Martin, Weakley County, Tennessee, ran during Black History month for many years. Downing has presented the essence of the columns in the order of their publication. Occasionally he summarized articles written by others about Smith.

African-American Bob W. Smith of Martin long embraced history and community. In the 1990s he began formally sharing his background along those lines. Perhaps in 1993 he received a Visual and Oral History Project Award that allowed him a venue to others. His major expression in February, 1994, was a collection of photos of black Weakley Countians in

² *Weakley County Press*, July 25, 2013, p. 1; and Brad Gaskins, News Editor, "Colonel Bob Smith, we salute you!," *Weakley County Press*, August 15, 2013, p. 4.

sports, entertainment, crafts, and social situations from the late 19th century into the 1960s.

Among them was the image of "Uncle" Ed Martin, known to Smith as the first free black male in Martin. Why was he "Uncle" Ed? Well, Smith's father once shared that "white men would call you boy until you get 80, then he would call you uncle. It more or less stuck with Southern people, black and white." For the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad, the seven foot tall track walker strode 24 miles daily in his size 16 shoes.

Smith's assortment displayed Huron Owl Silvertooth, an ex-Birmingham Black Barons baseball pitcher of Indian and African-American ancestry. The hurler once bested future black Hall of Famer Satchel Paige with Huron's homer providing the game's only run. He also started a team in Martin.

Understandably Smith incorporated numerous scenes with skilled workers who aided development of Weakley County. Through the years Smith became convinced Weakley County employers created conditions for black progress with less conflict than in other locales. In those circumstances blacks became quite adept in construction and other services. Consequently the region benefitted because owners "helped in the attitude and treatment of blacks in this area." Smith singled out whites Robert Argo, Abe Burchard, and N. B. Williams for training blacks. They "contributed out of love to see the blacks prosper." There followed names of 15-20 then well-known black hands.

One photo showed Smith just outside The Big Club in 1949. Previously the building contained a

black designated hospital preceding integration. Interestingly at times a white physician treated the clientele. Smith fit well into the entertainment theme since in 1940 he was a member of the Southern Gate Quartet featuring gospel and rhythm and blues themes. They were the first black ensemble to sing at the then University of Tennessee Junior College in Martin. With Rebecca Holt he danced as Bob and Beck. Smith exclaimed, "We were welcomed with open arms."

Smith primarily gathered pictures hoping youngsters would learn what their black ancestors had achieved. His general interest originated in large measure from "'being nosy'" and "'listening to older people.'" Like a conscientious collector also, Smith thanked his contributors. Miss J.B. Caldwell provided materials about her grandfather who was the first Weakley County Training School principal, the all black school in Martin before 1966. Other sources were Rosemary Bigham, Billy Joe Sewell, L.S. Atkins, Mildred Patterson, and Reverend Dale Willoughby, the brother of the Colonel's wife Gwen Willoughby Smith. Smith also listed white Holland McCombs who played baseball with several blacks as a youth prior to being a former Time-Life reporter. In fact, the exhibit was in UTM's Holland McCombs Center.³

In a 1995 Black History Month article in the *Weakley County Press* Martin native Bob Smith began annually sharing about the Martin area and himself. The retired UT Martin painter plainly stated his steadfast belief history must include both "my

³ "Pictures depicting black history displayed," *Weakley County Press*, February 17, 1994, p. 3.

black and white brothers," an approach "liked by some, and disliked by others." His multi-cultural slant recurred often in his columns.

Then Smith lauded a cooperative trilogy of employers, already skilled black laborers, and black beginners. He specifically cited winter brick makers at John Walters' kiln who in warm times apprenticed in masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electricity, and even teamsters, sometimes called "mule whoppers." He then named several persons in various categories. Among the plumbers Uncle Frank Cox purportedly ran some of Martin's first water lines. A few houses still existed from the efforts of those builders. One construction laborer morphed into a local electric system lineman. Harold Conner and Bob Smith represented painters. Prior to modern refrigeration and heating, black drivers distributed ice and coal to combat seasonal heat and cold. Some notable cooks or "chefs" were nicknamed Uncle Wig, Buddy, Tootsie, Pap, and Sunshine. Generations of school kids loved cook Charlie Moore, especially relishing his rolls. Surprisingly some master housecleaners were black men. The domestic Henderson Caldwell adapted to changing times by developing into a leading refrigeration technician. Maybe Sam Lee was a multi-tasking barber who also did car body and fender repair. Among a dozen listed skilled workers brothers Huey and Elmer Edwards were accomplished butchers. Naturally Smith included several farmers. Before mechanization Robert "Rib" Royster excelled as a horse buster. Understandably earlier times relied on blacksmiths. Blacks were active timber cutters and sawmill men.

Smith deliberately listed over two dozen employers, among them mayors and other community leaders. He thanked God for those "who were willing to hire and train, out of love, those black workers. Their contributions helped the black men to prosper" from the late 1800s through the 1900s. Together those groups promoted a wholesome environment. In a like spirit Smith counseled young people to educate themselves for everyone's betterment. Further, he quoted the prominent 1800s black crusader Frederick Douglas, "Others may clear the road, but we must go forward or be left behind in the race of life."⁴

Early Smith introduced readers to a couple of determined young black City employees. As an American Legion member, he particularly admired Vietnam veterans Emanuel "Tot" Taylor and Hershel Brooks. After military duty they went into the Martin water and gas departments. Fortuitously, in Smith's estimation, they were mentored by three of Martin's finest male supervisors Charles Vowell, Leon Williams, and Oliver Miles, men of notably high values. Taylor and Brooks responded positively. The former perfected his welding ability in routine assignments and in his spare moments by bonding iron pipe scraps to each other. That persistence led to his becoming an assistant overseer. Brooks read gas and water meters before transferring to the sanitation plant and becoming a foreman. For a few moments Smith digressed to mention Charles Pearson, another white City foreman. He also complimented Stan Buford for his masonry work on

⁴ Bob W. Smith, "Workers play key role in shaping Martin," *Weakley County Press*, February 23, 1995, p. 4.

the northern portions of Fulton and McCombs streets in a predominantly black area. The guest columnist admonished others by stating, "If you don't try to be good at something, you will wind up defeated with nothing."⁵

In his column of February 15, 1996, Smith sought to define or delimit black history. To him it was "the flip side of white history." History actually included every race, in his opinion. He trusted a reader would better understand after that edition. He then eased into a sketch about black L.B. Henderson, the son of Reverend Ollie B. Wynn of Martin. His religious participation was at Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church. He was a 1964 product of the Weakley County High School of Martin.

There Henderson witnessed the work of Principal Harold Conner. That administrator inspired the majority of students to being the best they could be. Smith continued, "This is my first example of where our white and black history was united as one, as it indeed has been throughout the ages."

Between the 1920s and 1950s an observer readily saw blacks of varying ages gathered before Miles Chapel CME Church at Jackson and Lindell Streets. They were expecting a vehicle, horse-drawn or gas powered, to take them to potato or cotton fields for the day. They sought work for food and clothing.

Young L.B. learned to work hard to support his parents and himself. Early he became a pearl diver, another name for dishwashing at an eatery. By

⁵ Bob W. Smith, "Hard work pays off for Taylor, Brooks in Martin," *Weakley County Press*, "Progress and Achievement, Part I," February 6, 1996, p. 4.

contrast, some "dudes" regarded themselves above such work or just unwilling to toil at all, Smith believed. Yet, L.B. readily strove as an employee at Hiram "Red" and Audrey Boyte's T Room Restaurant adjacent to the UT Martin campus. They appropriately possessed compassion and concern that young blacks "so desperately needed as they were growing up." Such good individuals long had insights beyond touch and vision for others. Smith deeply appreciated such supportive people.

L.B. also achieved away from Martin. With his degree from Chapman College of Orange, California, in 1980 he became a Century 21 independent realtor in Austin, Texas. There he and his associates distinguished themselves, winning various awards. For his community activities a church recognized him among "Outstanding Young Men." Naturally he maintained strong professional ties.

In Smith's perception readers could readily find "examples of our own destinies and lives as human beings, both black and white, intertwined." Further, reliance on God enhanced ability to handle life's challenges.⁶

Parental pride displayed itself in Smith's biographical sketch about Steve Smith. Like many others, the father once wondered what his son's future would be. Youngsters Steve and Johnny Shanklin were long best friends, even working

⁶ "Life shows how hard work can transcend humble beginnings," *Weakley County Press*, "Progress and Achievement, Part II," February 15, 1996, p. 3. Note: Though the article is unsigned, it has several characteristics of Smith's writings.

summers in hayfields. Later in the year the small son daily picked an amazing 400 pounds of cotton, according to farmer Paul Doran. The author observed less formality existed in the fields. For instance, supposedly farmer I.Q. Crockett even wrestled young hands during working hours. The owner allegedly had more fun than the boys. With those earnings at age nine Steve purchased his clothes. Early on he worked for the Boytes at the T-Room Restaurant just off the UTM campus. He became a member of the "T-Room Pearl Divers Association," Bob Smith's fictional name for dishwashers. At 13 he began cooking and by 17 he managed the kitchen. After graduating from UTM with a marketing degree, Steve managed a Lego Toys warehouse in Connecticut. After graduate school at the University of Massachusetts, he handled employee benefits for two life insurance companies followed by an ongoing tenure as a Pension Services Corporation vice president of pension plans. In wrapping up, Smith rejoiced in "the blessings that God has sent me in the way of my son."⁷

Johnny Shanklin represented another local youth who achieved beyond Martin. About then he married fellow Martin resident Vera Chandler. In the early 1970s he moved northward into Kentucky. In Paducah he was a carpenter's helper until he shifted a bit east to join South Central Bell. Throughout that decade he advanced upward before transferring to Lafayette, Louisiana, where promotions accumulated. While developing

⁷ Bob W. Smith, "Local children take right path for progress, achievement," *Weakley County Press*, February 20, 1996, p. 3.

professionally, he contributed solidly at his Riverside Church of Christ and organizations at his three children's schools and their baseball and softball teams. At one point he was "Volunteer of the Year."

As much as he aspired to put in 35 years with Bell Central Telecommunications, his heart was set on Martin. He firmly admitted, "No matter where I've lived, no place is like home and Martin is home."⁸

Since 1996 was a leap year, Smith got in another account, sharing about James H. "Skunk" Mitchell. Possibly he got the nickname quite early from playing with an animal he mistook for a cat. On the other hand, in Smith's words, "he could make anyone laugh when they felt like crying." In Smith's early years, he often heard Skunk singing at the downtown railroad station, continuing as he moved toward McCombs Street and to his K Street dwelling. He readily and easily talked with all kinds of people. His mannerisms belied his brilliance, in Smith's opinion. He communicated artistically as an instrumentalist and even as a ballroom dancer. Skunk started the Silver Leaf Jazz Band of Martin that aired on the nearby Union City radio station and played gigs area wide. Smith got his first trumpet lesson from Skunk and even a slap for loose lips. Hopefully more gently he gave young black Martin boys their first basketball coaching. He even established the Thunderbolts, an independent team. Otherwise, he filled time as a train station porter and

⁸ "There's no place like home for Johnny Shanklin when he retires," *Weakley County Press*, "Progress and Achievement," February 27, 1996, p. 3. Note: In some respects this article bears few traits of Smith's writings, yet enough to include it.

also deftly hopped trains, an ability surpassed only by wonder of names Frog Haynes, the champion leaper. Mitchell's other time went into repairing oil stoves and janitoring for an insurance office and a grocery store. Somehow allegedly he had contact with Wall Streeters and even regularly got compensation from a company named Brown and Bigelow. Smith's fondest recollection was Skunk's recital from memory expressively "Be still sad heart and cease repining. Behind the dark clouds, the sun is still shining/Though hate is a fate that cometh to all/Into each life, some rain must fall."⁹

In 1997 Smith prefaced his first article, briefly about the beginning and significance of Black History Month. Just as founder Carter Woodson intended to enlighten Americans about his theme, Smith wanted to counter misconceptions, some of which were conveyed through media. Thus, he sought to particularly inform readers about significant black contributions past and present regarding Sharon, a small town south by 8 miles. According to Smith, at one time its name was "Doll Town" due to the pretty black women there. They epitomized the best of "feminine femininity" and Christian conduct. The community's strength also stemmed from "very gifted black men" dedicated to edifying the settlement. His first example was Seward "Uncle C" Thompson, who constructed an early black church and houses for both races.

⁹ Bob W. Smith, "Memories of 'Skunk' Mitchell rekindle progress," *Weakley County Press*, p. 4. Regarding Mitchell's unusual Wall Street connection, see Col Bob Smith, "The good, the bad and the ugly," *Weakley County Press*, February 16, 2006, p. 1, 4.

Much sought after also was superb painter Henry White. Ellis Love was a quite handy plumber while Elvis "Dago" Jones expertly wired electrically. Multi-talented Tom Jones was noted for concrete finishing, guitar playing, sportsmanship, barbequing, and buck dancing. In the 1940s Kelly Rogers launched Pleasant View Baptist Church near Sharon and along the way married Smith's daughter Shirley. Smith appreciated the named and unnamed for inspiring "those of us following in their footsteps and benefitting from their labors."¹⁰

In the next installment Smith highlighted Reverend Clara Caldwell Busby and her husband Grover. They both grew up in the area and married during 1914 before relocating in Lansing, Michigan 13 years later. While in Martin, he learned construction under N.B. Williams, perhaps a relative of Martin's longtime Fire Chief Buster Williams. Grover particularly utilized that skill in Michigan. Together the Busbys provided a welcoming environment to Martinites seeking jobs in Lansing. More generally, for over 50 years she sought to improve black housing in Lansing. Moreover, she pushed into sectors previously off limits to women and blacks, namely employment at Reo Motor Company, ownership of a women's dress shop in the 1940s, and operator of the first black full service restaurant which served locals, black athletes and

¹⁰ Bob W. Smith, "Blacks play vital role in Sharon's beginning," *Weakley County Press*, p. 4. As Smith would do on other occasions, he listed several sources, including his daughter then Mrs. Shirley Smith Towles, Ezra Howard, Joe Jones, Mrs. Catherine White, Mrs. Patricia McDonald, and the *Weakley County Press*.

entertainers in the 1950s. She was the first black realtor around Lansing and he built housing for black students at Michigan State and blacks migrating northward. On numerous occasions they let new arrivals reside rent free while seeking jobs. The Busbys gave generously to several Michigan churches and were understandably recognized as humanitarians. Her fruitful life of 99 years ended in 1994.¹¹

The following week he introduced non-native Tennessean Mack Allen Dobbs, "a most unusual educator." For a short time he taught at his alma mater Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, before teaching in Carroll, Gibson, and Weakley Counties. As a substitute teacher he frequently walked to his assignment. Outside the school walls he taught wherever someone was interested in learning reading and writing. Whatever his credentials, he shared legal advice with employers. He toted his Bible, school books and special "California Tea Seed" in a bag. He gave that tea to thirsty non-alcoholic drinkers. Dobbs insisted, even demanded, proper English and unhesitatingly corrected "ain't" and "main" for man. "He would laugh at trying to teach Ebonics in our schools," Smith speculated. Undoubtedly in Smith's opinion, Dobbs would follow the advice Seward Thompson mouthed many years before, "When you are with men of wisdom, look wise, stay silent and you'll learn a lot." Dobbs'

¹¹ Bob W. Smith, "Caldwell 'opens door' for black women," *Weakley County Press*, February 20, 1997, p. 2. An accompanying photo showed the Busbys celebrating their 52nd anniversary. Smith's named sources were Mrs. Mary Paul Morton and Mrs. Patricia McDonald.

daughter became Mrs. T. Willie Tansil of Greenfield. Among her progeny were Dobbs' grandson Thomas Tansil also of Greenfield, and great-granddaughter Tara Tansil who became a UTM women's basketball coach. Smith named other Tansil offspring and summed up that the Tansil tree produced good fruit.¹²

Throughout his years and newspaper writings, music constituted a major segment of Smith's life. Consequently he lead off his last 1997 Black History Month article with an excerpt from the black national anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing" composed by James Weldon Johnson. Like other spirituals it speaks of belief in God and promised immortality. Indeed, Smith's people seemingly sing just about any place, including jail as New Testament Christians Paul and Silas did.¹³

In 1998 with additional "rich 'Black History'" of Martin, Smith introduced remarkable black women or "our 'Rib' short helpmates." In his mind years ago they were the main family income source. Their husbands often held limited skills, education, and only season employment. Consequently the guys alone could not earn enough income. In that way Smith countered a stereotype "that they were lazy and of no help."

Smith's first admirable frontrunner was Mrs. Elah Baker Randle, a.k.a. "Mama Elah." She came

¹² Bob W. Smith, "Dobbs leaves legacy of wisdom," *Weakley County Press*, February 25, 1997, p. 4. His acknowledged sources were the Tansil family, Miss Golda England, and Mrs. Patricia McDonald.

¹³ Bob W. Smith, "Happy or sad, voices ring out in harmony everywhere," *Weakley County Press*, February 27, 1997, p. 4.

into the world near Milan, Tennessee, July 4, 1885. According to Smith, her father Zebedee had been a slave who fought with the Confederacy. In freedom he allegedly received 40 acres of land and a mule. Eight year old Elah's first work was in hotels and boarding houses. About five years later she wed "dapper" Charlie Randle. That marriage produced three boys and five girls. What a great challenge for so young a woman. Fortunately she had learned many skills from her mother. Then Elah's midwifery put her in great demand among blacks. That situation resulted in large measure from hospitals being segregated and the dearth of money to pay physicians. Consequently she delivered many babies in McKenzie, Martin, Mt. Pelia, and the small community of "Shadtown."

Frequently Elah was with families days after delivery. Then she tended all the kids while also cooking, churning butter, house cleaning, and doing laundry. When births and hog killing coincided, she was quite handy rendering lard, blocking meat, making sausage and putting it into cloth sacks or canning jars. Smith's account gave readers a glimpse into life in decades before modern conveniences of at least the mid-1900s.

Not surprisingly she really got little money for her work. Instead she might receive hog heads and feet which she turned into hogshead cheeses, a.k.a. souse or souse meat. Some items would be other meats, dairy items, fowl, vegetables, and fruit. To 1990s youth, that was meager or no pay. However, Smith shared "'some had some and some had none,' and those who had shared with those who had none." Compensation aside, Smith last saw her

making sauerkraut under the shade at Hazel Collier's house. At one time or another many residents enjoyed Mama Elah's corn lightbread, cornmeal dumplings, molasses pudding, and biscuit pudding, just to name a few.

Meanwhile, what about her own children? Surely she must have been somewhat torn between responsibilities. As a dedicated Christian, she believed God would look after them. Her Palace Street neighbors were Jesus with skin on for her and her youngsters. Smith remembered, "Blacks in those days relied on the African proverb, 'It takes a whole village to raise one child.'" Naturally her older children shepherded their younger siblings.

Otherwise, Elah shared her faith and worshiped at her beloved Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church on K Street. During her sixty plus years there she was definitely a church mother. She and other members lead the way in starting the black homecoming annually during the third Sunday of August.

Smith knew many whites remembered Mama Elah. Among those most likely were the Hazlewoods, the Hansbros, the Kennedys, the Bells, and the Colliers. Once she gave Woodrow Collier two non-working clocks. Amazingly she had received one in that condition as a wedding gift. He repaired them and they were functioning in 1998. They constituted "two of his most prized possessions." ¹⁴

¹⁴ Bob Smith, "'Mama Elah' was a lady to be admired," *Weakley County Press*, February 3, 1998, p. 1. In composing that article Smith digressed in mentioning Mt. Pelia, a

Smith called on Duke Ellington to help introduce a black women's society. Ellington lyrics were, "As I walk down the street, seems everyone I meet gives me a friendly hello. I guess I'm just a lucky so and so." Those last three words reminded Smith of "a group of beautiful and highly intelligent black women" locally, the Sew and Sew Club. Beginning in the early 1930s and lasting into the 1990s, the association attracted females who were domestics, hair dressers, factory workers, musicians, beauticians, and even a licensed mortician. A high percent finished high school and some completed college. They lived their motto of "sowing good seed" through community services. Their annual zenith was their Monday night dinner which the late Mrs. Gladys Russ hosted. They held dances at which Skunk's Silver Leaf ensemble played.

The club provided community services. They had a Christmas savings plan "Sew and Save" from which they gave unfortunate individuals at least two dollars, a significant sum in earlier decades. For the bereaved they sent flowers and provided meals and funeral music.

Naturally they dressed well. Their clothing sources might be curtains, silk or laces from their

community in southwest Weakley County within yards of the Obion County line to the west. Smith stated, "I will write about this community in my forthcoming book. Watch out Mrs. Jenny." She was the Weakley County Historian Mrs. Virginia Vaughan, affectionately called "Miss Jenny" by many, including her Martin Middle School history students. Downing does not know if Smith actually progressed toward a volume. His listed sources were Doris Owens, Clarence and Grace Hansbro, Matt (and?) Jorie Hazelwoods, Porter Brooks Kennedy, Mary Frances Kennedy, and Pat McDonald.

employers. The good looks of their creations easily rivaled the items in Martin's best stores. Smith added, "When they were stepping, these lovely ladies were the very essence of female femininity, and that says it all."

Predictably their membership numbers fluctuated. Though death claimed many, others joined the club. Smith provided a long list of deceased persons in contrast to a relatively small number of current members. Unfortunately the women had lost one of their own the week of Smith's writing. In the earliest years members congregated each week, but by the 1990s were meeting twice a month at The Hearth restaurant or Kentucky Fried Chicken in Martin.

Smith wrapped up his comments, "My prayers are that the young women and girls today will strive to emulate the women of the great Sew and Sew Club."¹⁵

In line with his gender emphasis Smith greatly admired teacher Miss Pearlie Mai Hayes. He began with a commonly used phrase by himself and later generations, "From A.M. thru P.M." The former meant Mrs. Annie Mai Bishop, the first and second grade teacher, and the later was Miss Hayes. Their students were well schooled. Hayes was the only child of John and Emma Hayes of Terrell Grove. After she completed Pearl High School in Nashville, the Hayes family moved to Martin where she taught third and fourth grade. As time allowed she worked toward a degree at

¹⁵ Bob W. Smith, "Women's club 'stitched' many lasting memories," *Weakley County Press*, February 10, 1998, p. 2.

Tennessee A and I in Nashville, now Tennessee State University.

She combined love and firmness toward her students. A student either completed an assignment satisfactorily or finished it during recess. She followed up with a note to the parents counseling the student study there, too. Other disciplining began quietly without even a word uttered. Instead, she motioned with a curled index finger meaning "'come here boy.'" Smith remarked, "When she finished warming you, the seat of your pants wouldn't hold shucks." She confidently had parental support behind her.

Hayes' teaching went beyond reading and writing to music, introducing many kids to melody. She played a key part in putting together the singing Southern Gates Quartet which included Smith. Her firmness was evident in Smith's testimonial, "You had to harmonize and if you didn't, you were out of there." She regularly attended Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church on K Street where she played piano and lead choirs. Smith likened her earliest morning classroom to a church service.

Parents worked to overcome the lack of new textbooks and other school necessities. Led by Mrs. Fannie Crockett, Miss Ada Taylor, Mrs. Maggie Ervin, the PTA sold canned vegetables and fruits, sandwiches, and ice cream to buy school supplies. Still, Hayes pressed forward and her students became professionals and other trained workers. Such graduates likewise gave back as "by-products of all the Black teachers at the Weakley County Training School," the all black institution.

In tribute Smith added, "She gave of herself, money, talent and, most important, love. All who knew her will always remember her beautiful lifestyle."¹⁶

In the next newspaper piece Smith continued with superlatives. "Mrs. Johnnie Bell Caldwell was one of the most notable, articulate, black women to live and make contributions in this county and state." She was like a 1990s woman in earlier decades, someone claimed.

She displayed her abilities as a maid, caterer, teacher, nurse, and writer. She authored books about poetry and speech and co-wrote "The Baptist Training Union Manual."

Miss Johnnie was quite active in religious activities, especially at Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Martin. She was senior choir president for over 20 years and program committee chair for thirty-five years, particularly coordinating the Christmas, Easter, and Children's Day programs. For 35 years she headed ceremonies for the annual Weakley County Alumni Association Homecoming program. Of course, significantly to Smith she was the Oak Grove Church historian and research individual. She also held offices in the Baptist Obion River District Association.

She played a vital role at the Weakley County Training School. For multiple years she presided over the PTA. Her efforts helped make possible library

¹⁶ Bob W. Smith, "A life dedicated to teaching," *Weakley County Press*, pp. 1-2. His sources were Mrs. L.S. Atkins, Mrs. Freneze Royster, Mrs. Joyce Bondurant, Mrs. Sue Thompson, and Mrs. Pat McDonald.

books, cafeteria dishes, and marching band uniforms.¹⁷

In 1999 severe weather reminded Smith of the ice business in Martin. Irrespective of air conditions black and white ice men loaded their wagons on Church Street at the Ice, Coal and Coke Company to roll throughout the county. They delivered to train stations, minstrel shows, churches, picnics, baseball games, and July 4th events from the 1920s into the 1950s. One horse team was named Bob and Fred, and once a driver awkwardly "had to beg Fred to get off his foot." The ringing of a bell on the wagon tongue alerted potential customers that ice or coal was nearing. Some appreciative patrons treated the drivers with sweets or fruit. Youngsters, black and white, hopped on the wagons instead of walking. Drivers often shared humorous happenings experienced during deliveries. Delivery man Sandy Smith cussed because a caged parrot in the backyard of music teacher and First Baptist Church clerk Miss Musa Hall used the "N" word. When the spinster asked him not to use bad language, he retorted, "I'm sorry, please forgive me for my bad manners, but ya'll should tell that damn parrot to stop using the 'N' word."

In later years trucks delivered to more distant locales. Corn, hay, and tobacco folks in Palmersville and Latham were ready with their wheelbarrows. Some delivery peddlers had the colorful names of Bulldog, Big O, Bones, Egghead, Boogalo, and Plug. One attendant's handle was Bob Smith. One

¹⁷ Bob W. Smith, "'A woman of the 90s well before her time,'" *Weakley County Press*, February 26, 1998, p. 4. His main source was Mrs. Beverly Claybrook, Miss Johnnie's daughter.

driver's son was so small that he had to sit on a pillow to put him above the steering wheel. Teamster "Big Fred" offered ample cold water or Pepsi Cola to their accompanying lads. However, Smith doubted the clear liquid in the fruit jar was water because "it kicked like a 'Georgia mule.'"

Though such coal-ice businesses and many employees had disappeared, Smith cherished Mrs. Linnie Travis' charity to a diminutive black kid. Numerous occasions she paid him full cost for only about fifteen cents of coal in his small makeshift wagon. Maybe her compassion stemmed from knowing that Smith's mother labored hard for her three kids at Collier's Boarding House all week 10 hours daily for ten dollars. Certainly Smith considered himself blessed to have been associated with those fellows. Likewise Martinites Betty King and black Miss Willie Royster wonderfully remembered them for even small pieces of chipped ice.¹⁸

Smith's many interests also encompassed sports, particularly baseball. He claimed Martin had baseball players of professional ability over four decades beginning in the 1920s. He singled out players Willie Freeman, Dale Willoughby, Charles Shepp, Huron "Owl" Sylvertooth, Perkin Atkins, and Dillard Mitchell. Originally their field surface was hard scrabble, being where Argo's brick kiln had been and where the City dumped construction

¹⁸ Bob W. Smith, "No matter the weather, 'the iceman cometh,'" *Weakley County Press*, February 4, 1999, p. 4. He was thankful for informative and constructive contributions of Robert Walker, Harry Crawford, Jim Burton, Ella F. Fulton, James Royster, and Pat McDonald.

debris near McCombs Street and the railroad station.

Their baseball season spanned from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. "Skunk" Mitchell named the organized team the Martin Tigers. He himself announced players in "'fine fashion.'" Blacks and whites attended from Weakley, Obion, and Carroll counties of Tennessee and Fulton and Hickman of Kentucky. Spectators paid a modest amount for quality entertainment, and an individual got free admission by retrieving a foul ball outside the park.

At first the philanthropic Harmon Institute provided facilities, and in the 1930s the Works Progress Administration, a.k.a. the W.P.A., constructed a stadium for baseball and football.

For the readers Smith inserted photos and identified the players. Some nicknames were "Louise," "Jughead," "Snooks," "P.J.," "Kankus," "Shammammy," "Kid," Whatever the title origin, Smith listed "Col. Albert Busby." A team booster and an umpire were there, too. Understandably "Owl" Sylvertooth, the team manager and former black pro pitcher, appeared therein. Catcher-outfielder Raymond "Mike" Milligan potentially hit the longest homer during the annual homecoming at Harmon Field. However, the umpire, who ruled it foul, quickly leaped over the south fence to avoid pursuers and possibly "a head whipping." Another photo depicted the extended Chandler family which was "a ball team within itself."

Smith referred to some athletes not pictured. A shortstop threw so hard supposedly a first baseman needed the padding of a catcher's mitt.

Yet, Smith assured readers that Mammy Mitchell, once a St. Louis Blues pro in the black leagues, could gather it in. It could have been handled by "Teegee" Willoughby, the billed "Clown Prince of First Sack." A crowd favorite catcher from Dyer, Tennessee, was quite black, but Smith could not fathom his nickname "Old Yella." Two players from McKenzie, Tennessee, were nicknamed "Grasshopper" and "Brickbat." Smith saw fit also to list about 10 cheerleaders, among them the wife of a longtime umpire.

Smith lamented those quality players were 50 years too early for major league participation though one local played for a St. Louis Browns farm club in the 1950s. Still, Smith wished "for the day when Martin will again have sportsmen of this caliber. Just wanta say 'thanks for the memory.'"¹⁹

Smith shifted to Jackson Street, "the street of dreams." He first acquainted readers with Willie "Jab" and Ella B. "Mrs. Ella B." Busby. In Smith's view, Jab was "loved by some, envied by many and opinionated by others." Nonetheless, he became "a well-known and shrewd black business man," beginning with renting a small structure near 311 Jackson Street during the 1930s. She greeted customers with a room lighting smile, and he received them with "a penetrating manner" of great persuasiveness. The couple readily welcomed

¹⁹ Bob W. Smith, "Martin Tigers tamed many opponents in their diamond heyday," *Weakley County Press*, February 11, 1999, p.

4. Smith's acknowledged resources were Buster Williams, James Riley, Jr., Robert Walker, Grace Hansbro, Charles Prince, Leon Lovall and Pat McDonald, the later "being a very kind consultant friend."

listeners to the store front for early Joe Louis bouts when blacks and whites had few radios. Then and other times he enticed customers with his 25 cent barbecue sandwich and beer. Smith related, "He had a price for the rich and poor."

Improved finances made possible their own larger store across the street. Customers' trucks came from the distant Latham, Palmersville, and Hyndsver communities of Weakley County for sugar in 100 pound bags "for their distilleries." The poor could not afford whiskey, but economically well off residents bought at night or had items delivered during rationing of World War II. Slyly Smith observed, "No one could call it 'black market' in those days because we were called 'colored' then." The Busbys combined a well stocked grocery store and a restaurant with a superb barbecue man. At the meat counter a person could buy chicken, chitterlings and either end of pigs and cattle. The ice cream parlor turned out delicious sundaes and milk shakes, a desirable alternative to the segregated downtown P & S Drug store fountain. The thriving business allowed Jab to buy a new Ford each year and the Busbys to end the day by driving around town with their dog at the window. They branched out by building rental houses with an outside common shower. Regrettably the Busbys' fortunes definitely declined by the late 1950s.²⁰

Smith next moved slightly westward to the junction of Jackson and Lindell Streets. Black

²⁰ Bob W. Smith, "Busby store was bustling center on 'the street of dreams,'" *Weakley County Press*, February 18, 1999, p. 4. Smith appreciated the encouragement of Dorothy and Laurie Jones, Ella Fulton, and Pat McDonald.

fundraising suppers centered there around a single oak tree. A baker's dozen of women generated supplemental money for their organizations, selling barbecue, ice cream, and lemonade. Sometimes compassionate ladies like Mrs. Fannie Crockett gave a treat to a penniless kid. Due to proximity to rail loading, a nearby spot was commonly known as "the log yard" where timber men deposited green cross tires of 120 pounds. Muscular Vowell Lumber laborers shouldered a tie and quickly went up a 12 inch gang plank onto box cars.

Barbeque was often a fund source. Several people, usually men, cooked overnight. Many youngsters observed preparation over hot coals, a process called "q-ing." Their leaders readily solicited required items for their community events. For their August 8th "Emancipation Day" and Homecoming, the third Sunday in August, they sought assistance from the mayor and other government officials who "gave generously." Smith specified Harvey Gardner gave hogs for cooking. Indeed, some blacks still go to community leaders for aid. Smith continued, "We go with respect and receive respect."

Other celebrations unfolded on dream street. The really fashionably dressed were considered "all reet." They and others joyously danced at Silvertooth's Café where some bands had one night stands. Two Ton Tina, whose body coincided with the billing, was a featured vocalist. During the 1940s jitterbugging was a common dance and popular tunes were "Jumping at The Woodside," "Woodchoppers Ball," and "In the Mood." Rebecca Holt Edwards and Bob "Famous" Smith made their moves as "Bob and Beck," a name they

received after winning a dance contest over "Famous and Fadie" of Cairo, Illinois. Other individuals gathered for sawdust dances at which persons cavorted shoeless to "Dinah" and "Honeysuckle Rose." Earlier in the evening the usually outstanding dance teams won the category prizes. About midnight a band struck up "Goodnight Sweetheart" or "The Song Has Ended," signaling closing time.

To ensure decorum, proprietors set strict rules. No one could cuss inside, and a second offense meant exclusion from the property. Under those circumstances in that era young women proudly danced with young fellows, "not danced at" each other, Smith termed.

Nostalgically Smith endorsed the food, fun, music, and dancing on Jackson Street even if those by the 1990s were "Red Sails in the Sunset." At Sylvertooth's a patron could enjoy delicious buffalo or catfish, ham and chitterlings, and rabbit in cold season. Dorothy Sylvertooth stood out as the only Martin resident capable of cooking a rooster to the tenderness of a fryer. A later owner dished up turnip greens, blackeyed peas, candied yams, and special cornbread.²¹

In 2000 Smith delineated Martin's black community. He quoted a hobo who transitioned from Indiana to Martin as saying, "If you want to find

²¹ Bob W. Smith, "Lone Oak Tree at Corner of Jackson, Lindell was site of many fund-raising events," *Weakley County Press*, February 25, 1999, p. 4. Smith appreciated readers' contributions such as those of Mrs. Helen Rogers, Simmons, Baxter Fisher, Pat McDonald, and his own wife Gwen Smith.

the black community, look for a cotton gin, railroad, or someone playing or singing the blues."

Those markers surely fit Martin with blacks beside the tracks of the Illinois Central and the Nashville Chattanooga Railroads. On the east side they occupied residences from an old Davis house as far south as Broadway and Rebecca Streets. That area was pejoratively named "Monkey Bottom." The few black families there were employed at the Wess Gibbs' Tobacco Company. Among those named were his mother Susie Smith and his Aunt Kate Bell and Jack Edwards who barbered and otherwise repaired guns and watches. Likely alluding to discrimination against such occupants, Smith responded that "the best blow you can deliver to those who mock you, is the smile on your face that lets them know you are a child of the King."

Outsiders helped skew the image of that black neighborhood. Hoboes and other transients often left freight trains with a music instrument, commonly a fiddle or guitar. They asked for food or drink and frequently sang or played while something was being gotten.

Sometimes locals quickly got their own instruments and developed into "a full-blown band."

Downtown businessmen were glad to have those musicians on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at Oxford and Lindell streets near the local theater. Their playing attracted listeners and energetic "buck swing dancers," one interestingly known only as "Sweet Papa Snowball." Each performer had a distinct routine. The audience dropped money into a hat and generally

each person got around \$2.50 which contrasted quite favorably with a dollar for 10-12 hours daily. When some songs were struck up, they elicited "a hip-slapping, toe-tapping frenzy" while contrastingly others caused men to cry. After a session all might go to a local store for bologna, souse, and crackers that they washed down with an orange soft drink or "home brew" for a dime.²²

By now Smith had a rails series. West of the I.C. Railroad, presently called Virginia Weldon Park, were the boarding houses Parkview and Burton Hotels which employed blacks. The latter were porters, cooks, and common workers directed by Mrs. Nora Hughey. She gave deaf stranger Tobe a job as a flunky. While his full name was unknown, Martin soon learned he was a big kite maker and flier. Smith claimed on a south wind some kites went as far as I.C. Park to Hyndsver Road at least a mile and under good conditions stayed aloft for weeks. Seemingly one even had a battery light on it.

Unfortunately for a time Martin was overrun by rats. The desperate City paid a nickel for a rat taken to the power plant for burning. Robert Walker, one of Smith's friends, perhaps white, sometimes sold two rats in order to buy a pack of cigarettes on which he binged. Smith's black friend Denzel Busby used steel traps but one huge rat lost a leg. Supposedly that animal made a peculiar noise running on the floor.

A short distance up the I.C. rails from the boarding houses was the Main Street Crossing. Rail employee Andrew Sheppard flagged traffic there and toted mail to the post office until succeeded by

²² Bob W. Smith, "Local writer takes a look back with "Tales of the rails," *Weakley County Press*, February 3, 2000, p. 3.

his nephew Killie Warner. Possibly for security they openly carried Army 45 Colt pistols. Occasionally the crossing attracted train catchers. Ben "Frog" Haynes hopped on long enough to make it to Hyndsver Crossing with allegedly no speed impossible for him to board. Other nicknamed but somewhat lesser competitors were "Snook," "Skunk," and "Blindboy."

Certainly the railroad station and the Williams Hotel were worthy of discussion. Both provided employment for blacks as porters and baggage handlers. Young blacks picked up dimes shining shoes for passengers and hotel renters. N.C. and St. Louis Railroad brakeman John Turner, the grandfather of current Martin resident Mrs. Beverly Claybrooks, lived at Sebastian Hill, just east of the station. He worked despite a leg crushed in Hickman, Kentucky.

On that hill, too, were Mose and Annie Clanton. It is little wonder she was "Big Mama" at 300+ pounds. Tragically none of her 25 kids lived into their teens. However, she loved children who were drawn to her warmth, teacakes, and molasses. By contrast, "Old Man Mose" carried only 140 pounds, but wielded a 4-foot wrench to tighten rail switch nuts. In addition, he greased track switches and filled signal lamps with kerosene.

Nearby empty banana cars were on sidetracks. People of all ages availed themselves of ripe bananas dropped from the stalks during unloading at other rail stops. Possibly some cars had

been at Fulton, Kentucky, from which they were transshipped throughout the country.²³

In his mid-month "Tales of the rails" installment, Smith moved westward on the N.C St. Louis Railroad to the Lindell Street Crossing. A chicken house was there, but more importantly was Brooks Produce Company headed by prominent and influential George M. Brooks. He paid his black employees higher wages than other local hands received. During the busy fall season he worked between ten, to fifteen blacks. In the outside cold they had few coffee breaks though, in Smith's words, they received "a tongue-tingling, pleasing, belly-burning liquid which was called an inside and outside overcoat from Fulton, Ky," the common source of legal hard liquor. Often poor families got eggs which hens laid after workers put them onto Chicago and New Orleans bound trucks. The sometimes smothered hens during the hot months also went to the poor as did some escapees that were cooked on close by "green row," four two-room abodes owner Roy Clemons had painted green.

Traveling minstrel shows set up on the lot of Martin's noted Walter Travis just west of Brooks Produce. The black "Silas Green from New Orleans" troupe was known throughout the world. It occupied six railroad coaches with one containing costumes and music equipment. Their brass band and performers produced a colorful and memorable parade which drummed up local

²³ Bob W. Smith, "Writer's tales of the rail continues with 'catchers'," *Weakley County Press*, February 10, 2000, p. 4.

enthusiasm. The company compensated the Travis family with free performance tickets as daughter Mrs. Mary Lynn Travis Benson reminisced. That young girl "had never seen such elegance in their ability while performing in their attractive attire."

Smith mentioned other businesses near the rails. Ed King operated a blacksmith shop. It was adjacent to the Gibbs Busline and Horse Barn. Boxcars of wild horses arrived there to sell. Robert "Rib" Royster was Martin's lone black bronco buster. Between age 16 and U.S. Army induction during 1941, he broke horses for Will Gibbs.²⁴

In the next episode Smith mosed along the rails to Stafford Milling Company. It hired several blacks for many years. One was Taylor "Sister" Williams who somehow received the nickname from cotton gin operator Dutch Barger. Jimmy Jones once saved "Pap" Stafford's life by quickly stopping a pulley turning a grinding wheel. Quite small Uncle Johnny Burdett was also called "Fieldmouse." His long tenure with the Staffords necessitated his walking two miles daily irrespective of the weather. According to Smith, Burdett "loved the Stafford family and unlike many today, they gave him love in return." Four days hands worked unlimited hours beginning at 7 a.m. Usually one day a week they looked forward to noon when there were a couple of cabs at the mill to taxi volunteers to a Fulton liquor store "to get the dust out of their throats."

Northeast of Brooks Produce was Southern Milling Company. B.F. Hall and his wife headed it up before the E.B. Pritchetts took it over. Among their

²⁴ Bob W. Smith, "'Tales of the rails' includes much-loved minstrels," February 17, 2000, p. 4.

black workers were Wesley "Beanbelly" Waterfield and "Little Joe" Shanklin who did milling and also work at the Pritchett house. There was Johnny May Anderson whose pointy ears inspired Smith's aunt to name him Mickeymouse. Other nicknamed workers were "Jucey" and "Funny paper."

A strange mill story involved black Buford "Tiger" Beecham and another black. They were to buy a truck full of corn. Instead they returned to Martin seemingly empty. Unimpressed and unamused by their purchase of three gallons of corn whiskey, Pritchett retained them and docked their wages.

As a young boy, Smith learned of a traffic event. He and two other kids were playing baseball near the Hitchrack, a tethering place for horses and wagons on present day Neal Street. Suddenly a loud sound came from the N.C. and St. Louis Railroad caused by derailed box cars which plowed up large piles of dirt. Adults really did not allow the youngsters to get close and Smith otherwise could not give firsthand details. The accident killed a man and Smith related that "never had I seen such sadness on the faces of so many people."

Farther along was "craps hill," obviously a gambling site. Generally people went with great anticipation, but returned sadly. An amusing account concerned a man who literally lost all his clothes. He implored other players for something to wear. Mustering compassion, the game winner threw him a tie. Another occasion a shooter lost, heaved the dice and coins away, and departed in tears. Losing pushed some shooters to knee pads, meaning laboring at cotton picking.

Black families also resided near the section yard. He particularly called attention to the house of Dr. John Diggs, whom Smith billed as "Martin's World Famous Medical Researcher," and his school teacher brothers T.D. and Cornealus. An artist lived there who painted numerous Martin blacks. Their fathers were railroad linemen who loved to chant songs while working.

Smith was particularly impressed with black Anthony Dale Willoughby. A freight agent's positive recommendation overcame the railroad's initial reluctance to hire a smallish youth. He tended the coal chute on the N.C. and St. L. railyard, a daily task of nine to ten hours. He toiled there many years prior to becoming disabled. He was a heavy smoker, gambler, drinker, and womanizer who long carried a 38 pistol till he became converted to Christianity. Soon he became a minister. Over 34 years he pastored three churches, the longest being in Union City and Greenfield, TN respectively. Smith personally "received lots of black history and sound advice" from his brother-in-law.²⁵

²⁵ Bob W. Smith, "'Tales of the Rails' continue with Stafford Milling, coal menu," *Weakley County Press*, February 24, 2000, p. 4. Mrs. B.F. Hall was the mother of Mrs. Madlyn Pritchett, a well known Martin citizen. Smith acknowledged his sources: Mrs. Robert Brandon, Miss Dorothy Jones, Mrs. Helen (Willoughby?) Randle, Mrs. Rebecca Nielsen, Mrs. Sue Thompson, Robert Walker, Denzel Busby, David Harrison, and Pat McDonald. Willoughby's early buddies included "Fred (White House) Smith, another name that shook" Bob Smith though the author did not state why. Note: Downing wonders if there was only one Fred Smith who was known as Fred "White Honey" Smith. Perhaps "White House" was inadvertently typed. For another reference to "White Honey, see Smith's article of February 24, 2001, p. 2.

By February, 2001, after readers responded so well to his 2000 articles, Smith devoted more time to railroad related matters. He showed a photo of the I.C. and N.C. railroad station with the special Seminole No. 9 headed southward. To alert Martin, operators sounded its horn at the Hyndsver Road Crossing, then called Haynes Crossing. The name derived from "Frog" Haynes, a noted hopper between there and the depot. The train station got the descriptive names "Kissy Face," "Huggy Byes," "smiling lips," and "crying eyes."

As early as the 1900s passengers of both races relocated from Martin via coaches or boxcars. They were bound for Chicago, Detroit, or Cleveland among northern cities for jobs and "a better lifestyle." Though everyone paid for first class tickets, blacks neither rode there nor ate in the dining cars. In that segregated environment, blacks cooked and served food with style. Departing blacks got plenty of home food from family and devoted friends in baskets, sacks, and metal buckets. In fact, the Blue Goose Café packed some of the lunches. Common emotional parting admonitions were "Baby, please don't go," and "Please write often." Those remaining waved momentarily. When the train was out of sight, someone might pass around "a pint of palate-pleasing, pulse-pumping false pride." They might also sing "All of Me," which went "Your goodbye left me with eyes that cry, how can I go on without you; you took the part that once was my heart, so why not take all of me?" Another common song said, "Now she's gone and I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world." They heard the whistle sound at Haynes Crossing, an indication

they were beyond Martin. At that moment station porter Ras "Deacon" Jones blinked the lights, the signal for everyone to leave.

Sometimes romances began at the station. Martin was a transfer point between the two railroad companies, so people had to wait for their other train. For instance, Bruceton residents arrived on the N.C., but had an hour's lay over for the I.C. Smith only obliquely referred to a story that a night patrolman knew about one tryst.

Black high school students often traveled the rails of necessity. Black schools in Martin, Union City, and South Fulton only went through the tenth grade. Consequently black students either did not finish high school or they traveled to Jackson, Paris, McKenzie, and Nashville to complete the other grades. To illustrate his point, Smith picked the outstanding H.T. Conner. In 1939 the determined Harold commuted on the Fulton-McKenzie bus to Webb High School. If he did not have bus fare, advised by Skunk Mitchell which trains to hop, Conner caught a train. Smith extolled Conner for overcoming commonly faced black hardships to graduate from both high school and Tennessee State University. He became an area public school teacher, coach, and principal in area schools before UT Martin made him an administrator of students. In addition, he proudly served in the U.S. military. Moreover, he faithfully pastored the Fuller Street Baptist Church in Dresden.

It was quite fulfilling to Bob Smith that "Tales of the Rails" appealed to so many Martin residents.

Likewise, it was most gratifying to harvest so many magnificent memories.²⁶

For Smith the "Tales" simply had to cover the multifaceted James H. "Skunk" Mitchell, mainly "his comical expressions and unique personality." His readiness to help the needy fitted well when unescorted small kids had to switch trains in Martin. In World War II he readily ran errands when troop trains were temporarily in town. For the military personnel he got cigarettes, soft drinks and beer from Jab Busby's grocery or Sylvertooth's Café. He bought barbeque and fried pies from the Blue Goose. Smith did not designate the source for strong drink. When Earl White returned from the military, he was penniless after a dice game. Skunk loaned him fifty cents taxi fare to his Hyndsver Road home. Skunk himself was sacrificing only a pint of whiskey.

Paul Covington of Martin, a railroad retiree, passed along a Mitchell conversation nugget. An insurance agent asked Skunk about buying life insurance. Skunk had no interest in it. Then how did Skunk expect to get buried? His retorted, "I've never seen a dead man left on top of the ground yet, have you sir?"

Train fares were crucial to a good time. The round trip rate was a quarter to Dresden, Tennessee, and forty cents to Fulton, Kentucky. Often Sunday

²⁶ Bob W. Smith, "'Tales of the Rails' Seminole No. 9 brings more than romance to Martin," *Weakley County Press*, February 6, 2001, p. 2. Downing's note: Surely Smith's opening phrase, "From the early 1990s" was a typo because passenger service had long been discontinued through Martin before the 1990s. Smith especially thanked Paul Covington, Mrs. Freneze Royster, H.T. Conner, his wife Gwen Smith, and Pat McDonald.

afternoons young black fellows got the 3:30 p.m. "Pea Vine," their term for the 10-mile Dresden run, to dance at Bud Brock's Café till seven p.m. They rushed to the Jefferson Street depot to be on the 7:30 p.m. train to Martin. For the energetic the Martin connection facilitated hitching the Seminole to Fulton to dance much farther into the night at Anderson's Hotel Ballroom.

Other revelers arrived from Bruceton, McKenzie, and Gleason. Some young rode coach or passenger, sometimes termed the "cushion, while cash strapped guys rode the "blind," the coal bin behind the engine. To protect the looks of their clothing, the boys turned their coats inside out for the ride. In Fulton they brushed off their clothes and hair and danced away. At the end the fellows sometimes had to pool their nickels and dimes to pay taxi fare for the damsels. Meantime, they themselves hopped a freight and wished all the way it was going slow at the Jackson Street Crossing. Allegedly one person jumped off a fast freight and the resulting friction tore his soles off. The daring M.W. "Toby" Wilkins reportedly rode on the narrow "cowcatcher" with a women's stocking covering his face and a long sleeve work shirt protecting his ironed shirt.

Finally, Smith missed some services railroads provided. Hoboes did find a resting place. During cold months they could be around old heated stoves. They utilized other facilities and got funds from traveling passengers.²⁷

²⁷ Bob W. Smith, "'Tales of the Rails' 'Pea Vine' makes Dresden café regular dance stop," *Weakley County Press*, February 13,

Further, in "Tales of the Rails," Smith turned attention to food and medicine. Of the former supposed delicacies growing along the tracks were dewberries, muscadines, sassafras roots, and a different varieties of wild greens, including raggedy breeches, cabbage, and asparagus. In 2001 some of those plants grew near Southern Milling.

To older folks some plants provided medical cures. After brewing a plant similar in looks to tobacco, mullen tea reduced elevated fevers. Calamus roots treated upset stomach and bowel issues. Jimson weed, sometimes a growth in the Stafford Milling area, was dried and allegedly smoked to alleviate asthma. The black community gained their plant knowledge from Africans termed root doctors or "faith healers." Those Smith named were Cindy Bell, Nathan Allen, Jeff Freeman, Leaner Irvine, Anna Patterson, and Aunt "Can" Stovall, who died at age 115.

Understandably many individuals strongly believed in their wisdom and practice. Purportedly God had given them insights and gifts for healing the many who improved. Tommy Byars firmly knew Leander "Uncle Lee" Irvine cured his warts. Unhappy with unsightly and bleeding lumps, Tommy readily put his trust in Uncle Lee. The latter rode off in his wagon, saying he would do something within a couple of days. After some time elapsed, upon taking his gloves off, the surprised fellow found no warts or blood on his hands and feet. Practitioner Jeff Freeman, a tracks resident, supposedly could "talk the fire out of burn wounds"

2001, p. 2. His stipulated sources were Jackie Edwards, Don Bondurant, Paul Covington, and Pat McDonald.

with some unintelligible words with the healed feeling the heat dissipating.

Some elderly could ascertain the weather. A train whistle's vibrations could mean rain or winter precipitation. The engine's smoke hugging the box car tops foretold strong winds and atmospheric alterations.

During the 1940s emotions were especially evident at the railroad station. Accompanied by their families, draftees and volunteers awaited a train to ship off, sometimes to Tullahoma, Tennessee. Often in those instances distant kin were not so distant. Moments were precious for young and old for a last kiss or a last bottle swig. Smith shared, "The most tremulous emotions started when the whistle blew again and the conductor picked up his little step and yelled 'board!'" The old Navy veteran had experienced such touching scenes. In fact, Smith ran a photo of himself in his military uniform at the depot around 1942.

Smith ended the newspaper issue with acknowledgements and a request. He appreciated Martin denizen Paul Covington for his shining railroad light in his Main Street back yard. He bowed to Gerado Rodriguez and Pat McDonald for unfailing backing. He invited anyone with a Martin related railroad story to phone him.²⁸

In late February, 2001, Smith directed a virtual tour up the railroad north of the Jackson Street Crossing. On the right he pointed out the Sylvertook and England houses. The Blue Goose Restaurant

²⁸ Bob W. Smith, "Tales of the Rails: Rails help faith healers continue to practice," *Weakley County Press*, February 20, 2001, p. 2.

was on their relative's lot. To the left was the Sinclair Oil Company where blacks Ollie "Jack Johnson" Royster and Willie "Jab" Busby worked long years. Local blacks identified Royster with the famous 1920s black heavyweight boxer. Ollie fathered James "Big O" Royster and Sue Royster Thompson. The latter and Smith's deceased sister Mandy Love arrived the same night, delivered by Dr. W.B. Wingo.

Ollie's strength was quite helpful when Martin's streets were muddy. At those times blacks counseled, "go get Jack Johnson or Fred 'White Honey' Smith to lift the car out of the mire." They sometimes showed off their prowess by just lifting a rail section. Though the latter "was a shade darker than black," in Smith's opinion, railroad supervisor John Vanderford thrust the moniker on him. That manager also nicknamed Fred "Jam-Up" Lee after a couple of late 1930s black face radio comedians on the Grand Ole Opry.

Several businesses operated along the I.C. rails. At a corner was Sam Taylor's Black Forest Store which got its name from the abundant neighborhood oak trees. His son was longtime black plumber Olville Taylor. Nearby was the log yard which Smith had written about months before. Certainly youngsters at Miles Chapel C.M.E. Church enjoyed their Sunday School teacher taking them there for homemade root beer and lemonade. A bit farther along veteran carpenter and bricklayer Claud Howard ran a café and dance hall behind his house. By 2001 black businessman Billy Turner owned that lot. Black barber John H. Bondurant lived next to the Blue Goose Café. With shops on

Jackson and Broadway Streets he clipped both races. Other dwellers were the Roysters and Lillian and Shooter Atkins, a railroader. Their neighbors were Della Burse and her pretty daughter Roda, generally known as "Mama Rody." Supposedly it was sinful for men to look at such beauty, but they apparently peeked with one eye. Smith possibly agreed since his description was more detailed than other times. Unfortunately that section along the tracks compared quite unfavorably with her. Its "Tin Cup Alley" name derived from people discarding debris there.

Westward of that eyesore dwelt the large Chandler tribe. They put in the first black dry cleaners in Martin. Their sons Ed, John Will, Algernon "Big B," Soloman, James, and Kid constituted their staff. Further on the line was Papa John Hayes' grocery where he specialized in rag bologna, "cigar ashes, and coal soot hands." Bryant's Grocery was situated near the corner featuring souse, sweet potato fried pies, bountiful chitterlings, and buffalo or catfish excellently prepared by Norris "Uncle Hess" Hester. Across from Bryant's was the dirt baseball land owned by Huron "Owl" Sylvertooth. Years before it accommodated Walters brick kiln. There young blacks learned construction related trades, including plastering. Subsequently several black men built most of the stucco houses in Union City and Martin. As older men, Sam Palmer and Claud Howard plastered some downtown Martin places.

By now Smith had strolled his readers to Palace Street. Very obvious was Guy "Uncle Red" Hooper's Cabbage Leaf Dance Hall. His patience

reached its breaking point the day he could not start his car, thus earning the dubious distinction of the only Martin resident to shoot his auto. Eventually Albert Busby became the proprietor and renamed it "The Halfway." Later the Silvertooths put in a proper nightclub which attracted good touring bands. Eventually it went into the hands of Nathaniel Owens who ran the very popular "Hut Nut Night Club," still operating in 2001. The last rail side business then within the city limits belonged to Mama Gracie Smith. Saturdays were "old folks night," meaning only people over fifty years old could participate. Since a tour reader was then at Haynes-Hyndsver Crossing, Smith was tired of walking for 2001.

Ever considerate, he thanked all for engaging him.²⁹

Smith most definitely took a different format with his first installment of February, 2002. He conveyed a story about Theo, a little black boy, and his mother. Shortly after waking up, he wondered aloud, "What if there were no black people in the world?" She proceeded to show him necessities throughout the day that would not exist without black ingenuity. Sarah Boone was responsible for the ironing board, and Mr. Jan E. Matzeller crafted the shoe lasting machine. Walter Sammons came up with the comb and Lydia

²⁹ Bob W. Smith, "'Tales of the Rails,' Smith takes us on a walk down memory lane," *Weakley County Press*, February 24, 2001, p. 2. This time Smith was grateful for Paul Covington, Robert Walker, Sue Thompson, his wife Gwen Smith, and Pat McDonald.

O. Newman the hair brush. Madam C.J. Walker brought about women's hair care devices. Without Lloyd P. Kay developing the dustpan Theo could not have picked up the swept dust. George T. Samon made it possible for Theo's mother to dry her washed clothes. John Love's making the pencil sharpener and William Purvis' originating the fountain pen gave her a writing choice for a grocery list. Print resulted from Lee Burrige putting together the typewriter and W.A. Lovette the printing press. Thanks to John Burr's lawn mower Theo's grass could be cropped. Theo's mother could drive her car with less effort because of Richard Spikes assembling the automatic gear shift. Joseph Gammel thought through the supercharge system for internal combustion engines. Vehicles moved orderly because of Garret A. Morgan thinking up the traffic light.

They could get cooled foods from John Standard's refrigerator brainchild. When Theo's and his Mom's environment became uncomfortable, they could thank Alice Parker for developing the heating furnace and Frederick Jones the air conditioner. Elbert R. Robinson's creating the electric trolley became a precursor of the street bus. Theo's father could ride an elevator down many building stories years after Alexander Miles created the elevator. Phillip Downing and William Barry facilitated the mail service by respectively inventing the letter drop box and the postmarking and canceling machine. All of Theo's household benefitted from Howard Latimer putting filament in the lightbulb.

Theo's world was a healthier place due to black involvement. Dr. Daniel Hale Williams did the first open heart surgery. Dr. Charles Drew discovered how to store blood in the first world's blood bank. Tragically in the South he bled to death after a vehicle wreck because a white hospital was segregated. Smith believed, "Some good always comes out of tragedy."

Smith encouraged adult readers to share the column's information with their progeny "so that they may know we are in this together."³⁰

Just two days later Smith publicized his respect for the "Bob Wilkins Family" of Martin. Their ancestors were slaves whom John Gardner of the Gardner-Terrell Grove area freed during the 19th century. Bob properly cared for Mary Jane and their ten offsprings. About 1907 he got a job at Martin's Hall-Moody College, a Baptist institute created about 1900. Mr. Bob supplied coal to just under twenty pot-bellied stoves by carrying two heavy containers upstairs. Likely that employment accounted for his John Oliver Wilkins being nicknamed "Hall Moody."

From an interview by UT Junior College professor and famed novelist Harry Harrison Kroll, Smith's followers learned more about Wilkins. By then Mr. Bob had been at the college for thirty-two years. At most Wilkins had missed only two weeks of work, and he was most grateful to still having been

³⁰ Bob W. Smith, "We would still be in the dark without these inventions, A day with no black people," *Weakley County Press*, February 5, 2002, p. 2. Smith did not mention any sources for this edition nor did he say it was copied. Downing definitely wondered about its origin and format.

paid him for those hours. The challenge of providing for ten children was even greater due to there being twins Paul and Pauline. The family resided beyond the Masonic Lodge in a yellow house. To provide essential nutrients and reduce costs, they grazed a Jersey cow and worked a large garden. The lodge building subsequently became a black hospital before becoming the "big Hall night spot."

What of two topics that supposedly should not be discussed in public? Politically and enthusiastically, he stated, "I'm a black Republican and proud to be one." Religiously and fervently his "determination," that is denomination, was definitely "an Oak Grove Missionary Deep Water Baptist." He alluded to Jesus' being immersed and added "so why be sparingly with the water when a person's soul is in the balance."

One interview segment concerned education. He and his siblings comprised a large family, so all worked. However, all had some reading and writing ability. He characterized himself as "a wet weather student," one who strove on dry days and schooled on rainy ones. He wished all black and white kids could be educated. He then quoted a very meaningful poem: "You may go to college/ after finishing high school/ but if you don't have common sense/ you're just an educated fool." Kroll wrapped up with "What do you think college is worth to students?" Kroll and Smith were wonderfully impressed with Wilkins reply, "It makes a stiff fellow super if he will just stay with it."³¹

³¹Bob W. Smith, "Tribute to local family places importance on education," *Weakley County Press*, February 7, 2002, p. 2.

There was still more about Wilkins. Smith delved into the 1927 "Last Leaf," a Hall-Moody farewell publication commemorating its history prior to combining with Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. The compilers dubbed Wilkins, "Bob—The Most Loyal." It praised his 20 years devotion. Everyone remembered his sweeping halls and talking with students and his Christmas speeches. He constituted "a living proof of the fitness of the spirit of loyalty."

The "Last Leaf" aside, others profoundly admired the man. The meek and mild Wilkins embodied love and concern for all at Hall-Moody, a male colleague shared. While a pastry cook for years there, Bob Smith's mother Susie Bell was impressed that Mr. Bob fellowshiped with fellow workers during the evening meal. When the cafeteria overseer permitted the cooks to have leftovers, considerably Wilkins assisted, even constructing a four foot cart for hauling.

As already seen, Wilkins interacted well with all ages. His solid reputation made it easier for many blacks to heed his sage counsel. Those characteristics caused youngsters to consider him a father. Children knew he would share an apple or a pear if they asked. In his mind good manners equated with proper thinking and conduct meaning, "Use common sense and mother wit to carry you a long way."

His values pervaded the family. Consequently his daughters' housekeeping and cooking served the family well. They turned out quite appetizing four layer cakes. His daughter Annabel "Miss Piggy" Foster possessed her father's warmth and disarming

smile. Her housekeeping took her into several area homes. She worked for the Baxter Fishers, a white couple whom Smith personally knew well. In fact, the Fishers considered her family, a sentiment which existed even beyond her demise.

Wilkins' daughters were devoted to him. His wife and young daughter Pauline died at the same time, resulting in a double funeral. To their credit his girls Nora and Russeline remained with him and showed family hospitality to neighbors and guests.

Wilkins' sons made themselves known, too. M.W., a.k.a. "Toddie" or "Toadie" demonstrated outstanding housekeeping ability and window washing adeptness. That competence came in handy janitorially at a local drug store when he was not biking prescriptions to customers. M.W. and Sue Wilkins Thompson did work for the Frank Gibbs family. Some observers considered him a sort of lamplighter, arriving first downtown and leaving. Drugstore patrons were accustomed to his habitually having a Roi-tan cigar in his mouth, a trait also common to his father. He dressed well in name brand clothes, especially his shoes, even at his home church Oak Grove Baptist.³²

Smith added to the Wilkins story. Like "Toadie," his brother Robert "Snooks" Wilkins was well known in the county. He operated at the City Dry Cleaners on Lindell Street during the 1930s and 1940s. He showed skill and pride in his ability, claiming he put "razor-sharp creases" in clothing. Recreationally he excelled on the Martin Tigers baseball team and the "Thunderbolts" basketball

³² Bob W. Smith, "Great Martin family teaches lesson in hospitality," *Weakley County Press*, February 14, 2002, p. 2.

club composed of black Weakley County Training School graduates. Of a dozen named players, Smith contended only segregation kept them from being pros. He opined Snooks could have coached well, knowing the game thoroughly and encouraging players. In addition, he was an engaging and chatty conversationalist who frequently ended a session with "You'd better believe it." Like other family members, he worshipped at Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church where his father and he were deacons.

Paul was the youngest son in the Bob Wilkins family. He was quite athletic in boxing, lifting, and skating, especially shining at the latter. Pleasing a crowd with his smooth moves fueled his big smile. Pauline, his twin, skated at a level comparable. He got a job at Martin's Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company in 1939. Fortunately his strength and stamina put him in good stead for tasks requiring considerable lifting and shaking throughout the day. Smith just could not resist saying, "There was a whole lot of shaking going on." Occasionally Smith and other kids sorted empty returned bottles into like groups. Outstanding results sometimes meant a big Pepsi or O-So-Grape. In the summer Paul enticed boys to be at the plant because they might go along with delivery drivers. Some nicknamed kids who went out were "Juicy," "Pappy", and "Boogalo." Paul and the drivers assured kids adults would look after them. At times a perk was breakfast at a driver's house. Thelon "Pappy" Capps, a particularly caring driver, later was the Weakley County Court Clerk. Paul's first cousin W.D. "Son" Wilkins labored for Pepsi, too.

Plant owner Paul Clark knew how to keep public interest up. More than once he and Pepsi promoted the business by giving away a bike Saturday at the local movie house. Once the drawing of the Western Flyer bicycle made Paul Owens the winner. Somehow it did not seem right for a Pepsi plant employee to win. Resourcefully Owens rented the bike Sunday afternoons at a quarter an hour.³³

Smith had more about Paul Wilkins courtesy of fellow Pepsi plant worker Leroy McDonald. Paul's role there was covered till he died. Reportedly Paul's strength allowed him to easily shoulder a 100 pound sack on each side to the second level. Out of great respect, he carried each uncashed pay check to his father for him to "take his share." The balance went for clothes and "pocket change."

Instead of saying hello or something similar, he favored "yo." The combo "yo gates" labeled you a "swinger" to the popular big band music of the 1930s and 1940s. His love of that genre earned him the nickname "Music." Yet, for whatever reasons he was not seen dancing. The only thing Smith recalled Paul singing was the ad: "Pepsi-Cola hits the spot, 12 full ounces, that's a lot. Twice as much for a nickel too, Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you."

Paul's interests varied. He excelled at pool. His older brother Lee Artes had exceptional strength and Paul aspired likewise. Younger community boys imitated his style which also encompassed frugality. At Oak Grove Church he faithfully ushered and

³³ Bob W. Smith, "Wilkins family makes history at the Pepsi Cola Bottling Company," *Weakley County Press*, February 21, 2002, p. 4.

"performed gracefully during the worship services." In the late 1940s he married Jessie Brown. Their children were Mary Elizabeth, followed by Paul, Jr., who lived in Louisville, KY, in 2002, and James Earl. In 2002 he remained in Martin working at The Hearth Restaurant. He was first hired by owner Joe Bell and retained by the three Thweatt brothers. Smith complimented them for affording a good working environment. James Earl wonderfully upheld the reputations of his father, grandfather, and other ancestors, Smith felt.

Bob Wilkins' brother Dave, a.k.a. Uncle Dave, was generally a quiet fellow. That changed however on Saturdays when he viewed B-westerns. Engrossed in the story, he sometimes tried to warn the good guys of unseen threats. A lover of Hopalong Cassidy, he loudly said, "Watch out Hoppy," specifying the danger and location.

Almost out of space, Smith was immensely blessed by personally knowing such upstanding persons and their notable impacts on him, his contemporaries, and youths. Their work ethic and individual conduct demonstrated people should positively help others. "These things are imperishable," Smith affirmed.³⁴

In 2003 Smith reviewed the history of one of Martin's oldest downtown buildings. He was prompted by a martial arts instructor firebombing a

³⁴ Bob W. Smith, "Family legacy lives on in Hearth employee," *Weakley County Press*, February 28, 2002, p. 2. Smith acknowledged Gwen for her sustained backing and other sources: Ted Warmath, Mrs. Joe Bell, Baxter Fisher, Bobby Garner, and Leroy McDonald. He did not leave out his "biggest critic" and his "write hand" Patricia McDonald.

rival's business, leveling it in 2002. Decades ago black D.C. Martin owned the edifice. Smith and his peers held "fond memories of that old building." Black Ed Lawler barbered in the rear and gave Smith his first commercial haircut. He trimmed blacks and whites and offered shines at a dime for dress shoes and fifteen cents for work shoes. Occasionally dull manual clippers pinched a person's hair, leading one fellow to consider him "Rat" Lawler. His son Lilbert Lawler studied barbering in Nashville before joining his father.

Music was a big item in the building, too. Lilbert played piano with the "Silverleaf Jazz Band" in the second floor ballroom. "Sell" Carter's string band was named "The Houserockers." Seemingly Carter might have been a lone musician since he played bass, violin, guitar, and piano and sang. His emotional rendition of songs like "How Long" moved some to tears. That style and his blindness caused some adoring fans to consider him an early day Ray Charles. His one-leggedness did not hamper him either. Musicial comrade Manuel "Nig" Taylor ranked Sell among his best associated artists. Amazingly, according to son Pert Carter, the blind man taught reading to his kids. Bands also meant movement. Smith exclaimed, "Oh, how the people would dance." They danced the "Charleston Fox Trot," "Two-Step," "Black Bottom," "Balling the Jack," and "The Continental."

The building housed a "Catfish Kitchen," offering catfish, carp, or buffalo. Less costly choices were peanut butter or "greasy dykes," a sort of slick Vienna sausage. Fifty cents fed four people their choice of kraut, pigtails, chitterlings, slaw,

cornbread, and a beverage. The kraut, peanut butter, and sausage could be bought by the pound. Customers sat on empty 25 gallon oak food barrels.

Smith fully conceded that numerous blacks lacked education but readily worked. They expressed willingness whether as field hands, housekeepers, cooks, or shop boys. Those "boys" remained so until advanced age when whites referred to them as "Uncles." Many others went into construction of downtown Martin buildings and houses. He specified Odell Smith in Martin and Sam Palmer in Union City put stucco on houses in their locales. Others utilized their God-given talents as ministers, nature doctors, farmers, seamstresses, nannies, and midwives. They toiled from the "git to the quit," Smith happily shared.

Smith wrapped up thanking David Harrison, the current owner of the bombed out building, and Pat McDonald.³⁵

In 2003 Smith purposed to chat about a building but really pinpointed its owner, the late D.C. Martin. Unlike in some earlier columns, Smith maintained, "Things that happened between the races in Martin were no different from other towns in the early days." From there he related what Mr. Martin's contemporaries knew. He entered the world in 1872 to Hage and Rena Martin, who arrived in Martin from Virginia in 1832 with the William Martin family. Altogether there were eleven siblings.

Then Smith readily admitted that interracial progeny resulted from owners having sexual

³⁵ Bob W. Smith, "'Building on' history," *Weakley County Press*, February 4, 2003, p. 3. Sell Carter's wife was to celebrate her one hundredth birthday in March 2003 in Tiptonville, Tennessee.

relations with their black slaves, an illegal though often winked at activity. The facts came from a 2002 letter of Weakley County native William Olean Adams to Smith. Twenty-first century William's "great-grandfather was James Adams, the grandfather of J. Martin Adams and brother-in-law of William Martin." According to common scuttlebutt, ancestor William fathered D.C. "Doc" Martin with a slave. Likewise, generally local residents wondered what D.C.'s sources of money were as he did not acquire it from banks or other upper class whites. Some believed his white father made possible D.C.'s getting a grocery store, barber shop, café, and an upstairs hall. Dancing, skating, boxing matches, and minstrels occurred on the second floor. According to Adams, undertaker Martin definitely solicited a corpse days before the patient expired. Doc expanded his real estate holdings by allowing homeownership consumers to have lots of food on credit. At repayment time if the client could not pay, Doc seized the property.

Actually he was just a bit different. McCabe Temple Methodist Church named him a trustee. He steadfastly backed other highly beneficial efforts. Really farmers and other businessmen preferred his lower interest rates over other lenders. Doc and Miss Eddie, his wife, resided at the intersection of McCombs and K streets. They parented Reuben Bell Martin and Rohelia Martin. At least Doc had a chauffeur to shuttle him to work and around town.³⁶

Smith shifted his attention to another family. With permission Smith ran Louise Hester Arnold's

³⁶ Bob W. Smith, "Family ties: Tales continue from Martin History," *Weakley County Press*, February 6, 2003, p. 2.

account of her Gardner relatives in the Martin area. She began with Russell Gardner who made buggies in St. Louis prior to making Gardner automobiles there. He sold his car business in 1930 and moved back to West Tennessee. Her recollection started with the transition between buggy and auto travel related to the first time to see blacks. She was in the yard watering flowers when she spotted a black couple with the woman being decidedly heavier than the man. Both anxious and curious, she quickly retreated into the house. Louise's mother readily recognized Vaughn "Vonnie" and Ophelia Wilkins, lifelong friends. They operated Martin's Aunt Jemima's Barbecue, the cookers of "the best barbecue in West Tennessee." Louise's grandmother and grandfather Gardner were acquainted with Vonnie's mother Josephine "Aunt Josephine" Gardner and Vonnie's father Dave "Uncle Dave" Wilkins. In fact, sometimes Mammy and Pappy Gardner ate with the Wilkins in their Chadd Town home near the Terrell community. Sweet Josephine excelled as a cook and housekeeper. Louise's mother fondly remembered Vonnie's sister Lillie, a.k.a. Hank, stroking her young hair. As a teenager Louise's mother babysat black kids from Martin while their parents harvested cotton. She just considered it un-Christian for babies to be dragged on old dirty cotton sacks. Louise's great-great-grandfather Joshua (Gardner?) had also been compassionate. Purportedly they believed, "God never made any mistakes and His love is equal with all people."

Louise's mother further related how considerate Vonnie Wilkins was. When Mammy

Gardner hosted a wedding meal for Aunt Charlie and Uncle Claude Jerrell, Vonnie volunteered, getting up quite early to assist. Mammy Cora told him he did not have to be there to work. Yet, he wanted to make a contribution. The "good gentle man" got well water, carried wood, hitched horses to the post, and remained long cleaning up. Mammy Cora sent home considerable food for Vonnie's family to share in the happy occasion. Louise warmly stored those memories of the Vonnie Wilkins family.³⁷

Smith followed up with a second Wilkins installment from Louise Hester Arnold. Vonnie's daughter Frances Wilkins Hayes and Lenwood Wilkins claimed their ancestors migrated from Virginia and North Carolina. His grandfather David Wilkins settled at Como just inside westernmost Henry County, Tennessee, prior to the Civil War. After participating in that conflict, he briefly returned to a greatly changed Como. Upon seeking employment in Gardner, he also found his bride Josephine. By the spring of 1865 he was 16.5 and she slightly 14+.

Frances and Lenwood's cousin Elizabeth Wilkins Moore contributed family facts, too. David Wilkins' brother Jesse Wilkins purportedly possessed Indian blood, perhaps from a Valentine family. Likewise, Roberta Massey Rancifer, Elizabeth's cousin, belived in the native American ancestry. Asa or Acie, a brother of David and Jesse, was the "first to marry into the African race." His owner Mr. Wilkins sold Asa to a persistent Mr. Freeman, a landowner who actually coveted the

³⁷ Bob W. Smith, "Family Ties," *Weakley County Press*, February 18, 2003, p. 2.

whole Wilkins family. Asa definitely believed in religion and marriage, being a minister and being married seven times. Relative Virginia Gardner Hester described David Wilkins as a tall fellow with Indian traits though considerably lighter skinned than Josephine's medium African color. Those features plus neat dressing made David "a distinguished looking man."

Willie Mae was the first youngster of David and Josephine. The latter possibly was the daughter of William Grizzard Gardner, "to whom Joshua Gardner gave a farm and home in 1882." If so, Josephine perhaps paid tribute to him by choosing the name Willie.

Author Arnold then listed the names of and a few details about the ten children of David Wilkins and Josephine Gardner.

With such a heritage it is hardly a surprise the Wilkins family reunions originated in Chadd Town, Terrell, and Halls Grove, Tennessee, likely communities in close proximity. After perhaps a continuity break, descendants revived the gathering at Martin in mid-1955. Some persons knew the community as Chadd while others called it Shadd Town. More specifically, as youngsters, Lenwood and Frances Wilkins remembered it as Shadd Town.

Naturally families were interested in burial sites. Josephine Gardner Wilkins was placed in Joshua Gardner's Cemetery as were some other relatives before the Chadd Town spot. The kin buried David Wilkins at Union City, Obion County, Tennessee. The burial location was not specified of his second wife

Mother Okey Ford and his third Callie Lee of Martin.³⁸

At bit later Smith pictured black Henry Allen Mathis achieving well. He overcame poverty and adversities to become well informed when black opportunities were severely restricted. Coincidentally an author's previous *Weakley County Press* article was about Mathis' school mate H.T. Conner. Henry and Vera Mathis, his parents, had few funds for educating their brood. Consequently son Henry took whatever job he could get outside of Dresden elementary, not limited to window washing and cotton picking.

Smith gave space to that Dresden institution, The Turner Ward Grammar School of eight grades. Among the instructors Murry Nicks held forth from 1929 to 1937. Early teachers were Maggie Lue Mathis, Betty May Hamilton whose son was James Hamilton, Sr., of Martin, Frank M. Jickey Garthelia, Cavitt Carmichael Smith, Elli V. Fulton, and Rose Parks. The school began during the late 19th century. Its name likely honored Stewart Turner and the George Ward family. The determined fellow went on to junior high in Paris. However, in Martin and Paris the schools only went through 10th grade. Of necessity he studied at McKenzie's Webb High School, becoming the top student in his class.

Adulthood presented challenges. Not long after graduating, he married "sweet Lorain Coleman," his endearing term. In due time they settled in Paducah, Kentucky, and had seven kids. He landed good jobs respectively at the

³⁸ Bob W. Smith, "Family Ties," *Weakley County Press*, February 20, 2003, p. 3.

construction of Kentucky Dam at Gilbertsville and the Atomic Energy Commission. Afterwards he got his own mechanic shop. He observed, however, that teens finding entertainment in unwholesome places. Moved by concern for them, he changed his business to Lorain's Restaurant. There teenagers could gather for socializing.

All the while, he still drove toward more success. He created a construction company that built throughout Kentucky. With the passage of time he taught youngsters the building proficiency he garnered for himself. They learned so well a significant number started their own construction entities. He excelled in race relations, serving administratively with the Kentucky State NAACP. His achievements resulted in the Kentucky governor making him a state colonel during 1995.

Overall Smith viewed Mathis as a dedicated Christian and father who valued education so highly that his kids got college degrees. Accordingly, youth should practice good conduct and thus have God's goodness in them. Remaining in school and church was imperative.³⁹

Smith kicked off his February, 2006 effort by looking closely at Genesis 1, namely verse 11 about grass, herbs, and other plants yielding their kind abundantly. A reader might have guessed the Colonel was going to medicine. Black African ancestors had a God-given ability to survive slavery, segregation, illiteracy, and quite deadly diseases. For their well being, they transported herbs and spices for medicinal

³⁹ Col. Bob Smith, "Henry Mathis was exceptional as mentor for young people," February 8, 2005, p. 1, 4.

purposes. In the early 1800s both races relied heavily on themselves due to a shortage of trained medical personnel and remote distances.

"Uncle" Jeff Freeman was Smith's first listed practitioner. He applied his special salve for boils and perhaps burns. For the latter he moved his hand over the wound and verbally addressed it. For some sufferers the result was feeling the heat disappear from the body. Some believers claimed "Uncle Jeff could talk the fire out of you." Well, Smith did say he was writing about medicine men, root doctors, and "conning trick fixers."

"Poppa" John Crockett concentrated on arthritis, sprains, and sore muscles. His special liniment could be used on humans or mules. His catchy approach related, "Made in the shade, stirred with a spade, the best liniment that man every made."

"Ain't Can" was a mixed race dispenser in Latham of Weakley County. The basis ingredient of her scaly bark tea derived from the hickory tree. Excessive coughing was often termed barking which her tea stopped. Based on the name and the dosage, her cow manure tea sounded less appealing. The primary component was placed in a rag and boiled to produce a coffee colored mixture with 6 ounces to be consumed at 6 p.m. and bedtime. The afflicted then went to bed under abundant cover with a wool blanket next to the sheet. The procedure produced heavy sweating and a yellow stain with "a feverish smell." Consequently the coughing diminished. Her premise was that cow manure benefitted the bowels as cow's milk did for good bones. Smith

himself underwent the process first mouth as "a member of the drinking society."

Next, Smith concentrated briefly on Leander "Uncle Lee" Ervin. Mysteriously or miraculously he took warts from people. He was the father of Ann (Mrs. Willis) Brown, a long time Martin resident.

In his columns Smith attempted to include people from throughout Weakley County. So, he elaborated on Memphis born Dr. Charles "Champ" Champion whose mother relocated her boy to small Greenfield. Champion's grandfather Ellis Allen was an Illinois Central Railroad section hand. Smith injected his grandmother, maybe an Allen relative in Greenfield, was a well known nanny. At that time new mothers required help since they were ordered to remain in bed for two weeks. During that span his grandmother tutored the new mother in pediatric care.

Finally back to Charles. According to him, rural areas firmly believed in folk medicine out of tradition and limited finances. They sought mullion leaves for a tea to treat asthma and other respiratory conditions. Another concoction consisted of melting animal tallow, applying it to the chest, and covering it with warm or hot flannel. To alleviate hemorrhoids, afflicted individuals collected heavy grease from a railroad hot box by the track to smear on the site.

Champ admired the previous generations for seeking relief from "aches, pains and colly wobbles" whether warts, rheumatism, halitosis, asthma, or libido. Through experimentation those ancestors "eventually built into a verbal encyclopedia of folk medicine."

Champion had a diverse education. During 1950 he graduated from the Weakley County Training School. Aspiring to be a physician, he enrolled at Tennessee State University which was not the best fit for him. Instead he finished at Xavier University of New Orleans and interned in that city. Considerable exposure to herbal medicine there fed his avid interest in folk remedies. His growing herbal expertise accumulated more at Champion Pharmacy in Memphis.

Still through the years he remained proud of his the Weakley County Training School education. Finally Smith wished Dr. Champion God's riches blessings.⁴⁰

In the next installment Smith related American slavery to Tennessee's experience. Briefly he surveyed black history in America, beginning with Jamestown. Soon imported Africans were no longer free in the colonies. Decades later, influenced by the Declaration of Independence and Tennessee conditions, on August 8, 1863, Andrew Johnson freed his slaves with his wife delivering the news. Although free to leave, all their former slaves remained with the Johnsons. On October 24, 1864, Tennessee military governor Johnson declared all men in Tennessee free. He requested the former slaves to be peaceful though they could defend themselves against "traitors and ruffians." In February, 1865 African-Americans in Nashville gave him a gold watch because of his efforts. That day he also certified the state constitution prohibiting slavery in Tennessee in perpetuity. Allegedly Johnson had a blood tie to slavery. His quite young

⁴⁰ Col Bob Smith, "Medical treatment not readily available," *Weakley County Press*, February 2, 2006, p. 1, 6.

slave William Andrew Johnson had more liberties in Greeneville, Tennessee, than other Johnson slave. He even sometimes worked jobs off the plantation, a privilege sometimes extended to worthy hands. Johnson's slaves commonly claimed William was Andrew's own son.

Smith parenthetically commented on whites' titles for blacks in Martin. In earlier years he asked his uncle why whites spoke to him as "Boy." His advice was not to let the nominative bother a black. Smilingly he explained some people would address him as "Boy" until he was 80 years old and then switch to "Uncle." At that point Smith could be "Uncle Bob."

Then August 8th entered Smith's script. In mid-September, 2005, he and otherwise unidentified Jeff Hooker were invited to Greeneville, Tennessee, to discuss possibly reviving celebration of August 8th. Other invitees were from 20 Tennessee counties and 12 Kentucky counties. Speakers were there from other states and even Africa. Some states observed other dates and names for the 8th, such as Texas naming it "Juneteenth" and celebrating on June 19th.

Smith credited John Gardner with having the first August 8th observance as far as Weakley and Obion County blacks knew. During the 1800s he had transferred Mississippi slaves to the Terrell community in Weakley County.

In the Public Wells community not far from Martin some freed persons remained with previous owners while others learned occupations in Martin, trades Smith had discussed in earlier columns. To

that list he added attorneys most prominently "Uncle" Joe Shad of Shadtown in the Mt. Pelia area.

More generally Weakley County blacks celebrated much the same each year. There was a baseball game, a barbecue, and an evening dance that ended around daybreak. The types of dance steps were "bunny hop, snake hip, foxtrot, turkey hop, bucks wang and the shimmy." Their vigorous gyrations caused some observers to think they might actually shake their clothes off. Blacks held those annual episodes into the middle 1950s in Weakley County.

Smith particularly informed readers of Venious "Hon" Caldwell who was born near Three Point Grocery on Martin's west outskirts. The woman who would be 100 years old in mid-February distinguished herself by fixing meals for her neighbors over 56 years. She was of mixed blood, her parents being Indian and Creole. Impressively she still quilted and mowed her yard. Smith hoped to honor her further "for keeping the memory of our freedom alive and in the hearts of so many though the passing years."⁴¹

In mid-February 2006 Smith presented his take on race relations in Martin historically. Though instances of violence existed, in general, harmony reigned. More times than not a notable person defused tensions with the right words.

A prime example was A.D. Willoughby, a.k.a. Rev. "Dale" Willoughby. In October, 1899, he entered the world in the rural Campground community. In Martin, however, he lived on North McCombs Street. He often played baseball with the

⁴¹ Col. Bob W. Smith, "Reclaiming freedom," *Weakley County Press*, February 9, 2006, p. 1, 4.

white kid Holland McCombs on the latter's grandparents farm where UT Martin now is. The battery was Dale pitching, Carter Smallwood, who had some Indian ancestry, catching, and McCombs playing first. Other times Dale just rode his bike down the muddy street before cinders were spread on the surface.

In 1982 grandson Marshal Randle asked Grandpa Dale to tell him about race relations in Martin. Those involving "intelligent whites and blacks" were good. Other whites caused conflict by calling them the perjorative of Negro. Some blacks, however, told their youngsters such whites were not smart. They should have known that "God never made anything that wasn't good."

Etiquette applied on the sidewalks. Those really were just on two 12" wide boards paralleling each other and just wide enough for one person going each direction. There was a five dollar fine for spitting on or riding a bicycle on them. White couples walking abreast usually expected black pedestrians to get off into the mud. Some blacks let the insult pass, but others were belligerent. Sometimes the races "would share the walk intelligently." Fortunately Willoughby's work allowed him to avoid sidewalks by riding a horse to take meats, soda, salt, or meal to Hall-Moody College at a gallop and return in a trot.

Willoughby related a potentially extremely violent incident. It began after Skunk Mitchell bested a white boy in a fight. The latter's dad did not accept the outcome. He got a dozen men together to harm Mitchell. Those whites went to the Mitchell house where "Pa" Mitchell met them with a

single shot military weapon. He vowed to give his life if necessary. The father requested his daughters be allowed to leave the house in peace before a surrender. They dressed Skunk in women's clothes and a wig, so Skunk left between Zelma and Martha. Smith could not resist an aside that supposedly "they all look alike."

For health reasons Skunk joined the U.S. Army, thereby avoiding a Martin lynch mob. However, serious days were ahead while stationed with the 25th Infantry in Brownsville, Texas. He was charged with participating in a race riot and sentenced to hanging.⁴²

In fact, he even watched the construction of the gallows. Small wonder that he slept little the night before the scheduled execution. Almost mid-morning officials informed him of his dishonorable discharge and assignment to Fort Leavenworth federal prison for life. He educated himself there and also became friends with a Wall Street broker's son in the prison machine shop. The combination of being a model prison and friendship with that guy resulted in the broker getting both paroled.

Martin became home again. Shortly he organized and coached the Thunderbolts, the first local basketball team. He began the SilverLeaf Jazz Band and coached Smith's first trumpet session, leading to the parenthetical "Thank you for the lip, my friend." In spite of personal crises Skunk readily looked outward. Mitchell taught their mutual friend Willis Brown Algebra 1 problems. Jimmy Burton, a white fellow friend and UTM painter, recalled several

⁴² Col Bob Smith, "The good, the bad and the ugly," *Weakley County Press*, February 16, 2006, p. 1, 4.

times the ad on the back of Skunk's jacket, "Oil stoves fixed." White Baxter Fisher reminisced Skunk did chores at the downtown Fisher insurance office.

Mitchell displayed a range of emotions. He might smile or cry while reciting Longfellow's "Be still, sad heart." At the end he might tack on, "But too much has fallen on mine." In the early 1960s his brother Sylvester "Mammy" Mitchell brought some resolution to him. Maybe as a result of becoming a St. Louis Blues first baseman and hall of famer, Mammy made contact with an Army historian. Their findings brought about Skunk's exoneration, possibly a bit offsetting his declining health. He received an honorable discharge and restored rank. In 1964, James advised, "Be good, act good and surely goodness will be your reward."

Thereafter Smith shifted to another ugly incident in Martin. The initial situation started with law officers raiding little Floyd "Humpie Jack" Patterson, a bootlegger residing next to Miles Chapel Church. They especially wanted to search a trunk though Floyd maintained it was empty. After an officer kicked the suspect and cussed a racial slur, Patterson retrieved an automatic handgun from the chest and killed the lawman. Another policeman dispatched Patterson, firing a fatal shot through a window. Reverend Dale successfully pleaded with a lawman not to shoot Floyd's girlfriend. The Martin police chief Tom Quarles was credited with largely ending the violence.

Yet, emotions seethed. Uneasy blacks speculated there still might be vigilantees that night. Their communication spread via "The Black Banner," Will "Pappy Doll" Milner's term for word of mouth.

Black leaders Blue Mathis, Dave Wilkins, Guy Hooper, and Tom Smallwood had supporters to block any white retaliation. Once the white mob moved beyond the Illinois Central tracks on Lindell Street near Southern Milling, from the north Mathis appeared. Addressing the "white folk," he reasoned no one had a right to kill others that night. However, if the whites stepped further north, there were at least 20 armed blacks prepared to fire. A prominent white carpenter intervened with "You 'blanky blanks' go home and 'N-word' do the same." He somehow guaranteed nothing further would happen again. Each side backed off. Some blacks felt they had been sufficiently warned and departed town. Smith added, "And some were so afraid; they caught the train that 'just left.'"

Smith was thankful to caring people who made peace possible in the past and the present.⁴³

In 2007 Smith's good young friend Linville Freeman shared his appreciation for the writer's articles and urged inclusion of generally more county residents. The Colonel then decided to write about a different topic, "Midway Farms" of Obion County so named for being between Union City and Martin. He included that farm due to its employing many Weakley Countians and because its owners were "an unforgettable family," the Meeks. While temporarily in Martin, Anne Meek had shared with Smith the writings of her oldest brother. John Paul

⁴³ Col Bob Smith, "The good, the bad and the ugly," *Weakley County Press*, February 23, 2006, p. 1, 6. Smith acknowledged the assistance of the two Mitchell daughters, Pat McDonald, and James Burdette, a local white resident in Martin.

Meek, 1925-2004, had written about the impacts of his father William Paul Meek and the farm in "Rural Roots" during 1990. Their one cow helped the farm become a success and eventually the heavy negative effects of a war economy triggered its sale.

The Meek family arrived around the Martin area in the 1800s where Paul's father Felix developed into an "energetic farmer and mule trader." Over a decade he specifically saved \$100 a year toward keeping his business and five children going. The farm was adjacent to the railroad.

His son Paul, born in 1897, developed a lifelong attachment to agriculture. However, he attended the Methodist McFerrin Academy in east Martin, aspiring to become a physician. Because of a particularly "lean year for farmers and his father's need of him," the son postponed college a year. Fortitously the bumper crop of 1914-1915 inspired Paul to change to agricultural studies at UT Knoxville in 1915. There he met Martha Campbell who appealed to the young fellow. Later Martha taught home economics at Grove High School in Paris, Tennessee.

Actually Paul waivered between occupations. He soon became a math teacher and football coach at Harlan, Kentucky. At his father's persuasion Paul bought a farm two or three miles south of town and near an agricultural plot owned by Felix's brother Russell farm in the Martin vicinity. Paul turned the place over to a sharecropper while commodity prices markedly declined in the post-war years. Meantime, Paul was still into teaching as was Martha whom he married in 1922.

A bad turn in the Kentucky school environment necessitated Paul taking his family back to Weakley County in 1927. The Meek relatives counteracted low crop prices by starting Meek Brothers Sausage. Their wives sewed cotton bags for selling sausage in area stores. While that business was going well, Paul was invited back to teach in Kentucky. The improved situation there also lead Paul to get a Master's degree in Knoxville. That advanced study qualified him to become the UT Junior College executive officer in Martin during 1934.⁴⁴

Back in northwest Tennessee, Paul assumed more direction of the family farm. He drew closer to Paul Palmer who still worked the place. Still Meek stayed abreast of technological changes and adopted them. Frequently Paul and his family visited at Russell's store at Midway. It was usually busy when other farmers purchased their flour, sugar, meal, and additional items.

The Meeks' circumstances were different in Martin. Their house on North McCombs Street sat close to the railroad tracks which exposed them to hoboes. Such wanderers were numerous during the depression; sometimes they took food from the Meek plot without permission. Paul taught his son John Paul both vigilance and chores. It was common then for many Martin families to have chickens and cows for food. The youngster took care of Dorothy, the newly purchased Jersey bovine, even learning to mix feed for her.

⁴⁴ Col Bob Smith, "History involves everyone," February 15, 2007, p. 1, 4. Note: Downing was puzzled that the Colonel referred to Paul Meek as David.

The family shifted to Moody Avenue where they had a rented barn and fenced lot. Dorothy produced 2.5 gallons daily, much more than the Meeks required. In a short time they began to sell milk. They delivered a gallon for thirty-five cents to the (Paul?) Moores and the (Gene?) Stanfords, their neighbors. Resourcefully the Meeks had butter and buttermilk for the family and for sale. John Paul especially enjoyed cornbread in buttermilk, a "treat fit for a king." Dorothy once had a one-eyed calf with an "uncertain temper;" however, it was Dorothy who eventually entered a frozen food locker.

The Meeks could only keep their farm so long. Yes, World War II was pushing product prices higher in Europe. Unfortunately U.S. agricultural uncertainties, interest payments, and time constraints strained family circumstances. In 1940 the Meeks accepted the first purchase offer. So, after two decades the holding was no longer theirs.

John Paul was moving along, too. In 1942 he got a job on the college farm working with Mr. John McMahan, the agriculture head. During the summer it consumed 10 hours for 5 days and Saturdays half a day, tending tomatoes, harvesting okra, and carrying for 2,000 chickens. He was profoundly surprised at ideas some other farm workers held. One man was an illiterate who believed the earth was flat. Young Meek realized he had been insulated from uneducated individuals. Obviously he was learning valuable insights from that employment.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Col Bob Smith, "Midway Farm has place in history," February 22, 2007, p. 1, 4.

Smith stated, "Midway Farms proved to be a historical workplace for many African-Americans." In the 1930s many Tennesseans were unemployed with relatively few jobs existing. Sharecroppers eked out a living as did Colonel Bob Smith's family once on the Hawks' Farm contiguous with UTJC campus. The Meeks did meat processing in the Midway Farm Slaughterhouse which hired men of black, white, and Indian origin. In Smith's opinion many would have been underfed without the Meek Slaughterhouse. He even injected an old folksaying, "Proud as a town dog in a country smokehouse." For that reason men walked long distances to earn pay for night work and discardable scraps like backbones, feet, liver, and skins. They sacked their fresh gleanings and put them on their shoulders, protecting their clothes from dripping blood by wearing raincoats. Others resourcefully constructed push carts to haul more. A T-model truck owner transported more for some peddling in nearby towns.

Smith's family resourcefully survived. Daily his uncle with sacks over his shoes walked 7.5 miles one way to Midway. Besides earning money, he took home remnants, "pluck and plunder." The Smiths, otherwise, had fresh meat by killing at least one hog a year. A common saying then was, "There was nothing lost from the hog but the squeal," being edible from "rooter to the tooter."

John Paul composed "I Allus Follows Footsie." The Midway Farm work load was heavy well before tractors became common. Nonetheless, Saturday was a more relaxed day among black and whites with sporting tests of strength sometimes. Paul was

about 6' tall and 190 pounds. His challenger was hired hand "Footsie," who was a bit taller and heavier. Meek finally outwrestled his opponent. Next a lighter skinned black fellow with less weight than Meek announced, "I allus follows Footsie." Quite confident, Meek expected a quick match. He was half right, shortly seeing more of the sky than he desired. He had been set up with Footsie sapping much of Meek's strength. Yes, Meek readily comprehended why "I Allus Follows Footsie."

Smith unexpectedly gained another bit about Footsie. While in Union City one day, he talked to a longtime friend at the Last Word Café. He filled her in about his Black History Month accounts and commented about some Terrell community men at the Meek farm. At the mention of Footsie's name, she pleasantly exclaimed, "That's what they called my father." For some unfortunate reason Mrs. Josephine "Josie" McCall had never seen William "Foots" Miles.⁴⁶

In writing about Sharon, Tennessee, Smith broached unprinted black matters. He reiterated his belief history could not exist "without the inclusion of All God's children," black and white. Happily cooperation permitted him to produce accounts "without any guilt or animosity." Sharon was complimentarily nicknamed "Doll Town," due to its "lovely black women with beautiful skin colors that

⁴⁶ Col. Bob Smith, "Jobs were hard to find during the depression," *Weakley County Press*, February 27, 2007, p. 1, 4. Smith acknowledged his new found history sources, Anne Meek of Norfolk, Virginia and John Paul Meek, and Weakley Countians who wished him the best. Note: Downing does not know why Smith throughout referred to Paul William Meek as David.

were dark to light tan." Maybe even "Little New Orleans," Smith added. Consequently reportedly males from various towns went there by horse, bikes, or foot for romance or "just to gaze at so many irresistible ladies."

Smith next named families, some who went back to the 1800s. Will and Annie Love's daughters were Edna, Virginia, and Marie. "Tobe" Tansil's daughters included Calvinia, Zellnora, Many, Morine, and Oralee. Emory Love's offspring numbered Opal and Vivian and son "Boots." World War II veteran Jessee Clemons produced Beatrice and Roberta and James, Ezra, Jesse, Jr., and Harry Lane.

Their ancestors abetted Sharon toward a township. Some were freed individuals from farther south. Others were liberated here, but remained with their former owners. Many freedmen strove to have houses, schools, and churches. Charles Roberts did blacksmithing whereas Kelly "Brite Eyes" and Roger Seward did carpentry. Thompson Seward exhibited an uncanny ability to select timber, accurately eyeing the square feet of a tree. His skill extended to the tree types most suitable for cross ties and rail pilings, utility poles, and bridge timbers. After harvesting and processing, the wood shipped throughout the U.S.

Moreover, those families promoted racial harmony in Smith's opinion.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Col. Bob Smith, "Freed slaves helped Sharon grow," *Weakley County Press*, February 5, 2008, p. 1, 4. On page 1, the *Weakley County Press* previewed Smith as follows: "Local black historian offers historic vision," "Col. Bob Smith of Martin spends each February honoring Black History Month with local ties to

Smith changed emphasis a bit to mention discrimination. One day he was seated in the black section of a Sharon café when he saw caucasian "Cage" Vowell and blacks coming through the front door. In the Southern tradition the owner promptly told Cage he could not serve Negroes up front. In essence, Vowell's unprintable words were the men thirsted from the very hot work and day. He admantly insisted they be supplied. Smith concluded, "So they were served with fine Southern hospitality."

The Colonel also shared a story about H.E. Cheeseman of Wisconsin who went to Sharon in 1936 to purchase timber for the Manna timber business. The German employed Sharon blacks for their outstanding abilities. He gruffly barked out orders. When asked how employees could endure his demanding orders, they fell back on the saying about a dog's barks and bites. Smith stated those fellows "knew that sometimes the lips of men betrays the heart." He believed white employers acted kindly toward hired hands and "ignored being called 'N-lover.'"

Smith admired Harold "Slim" Tansil who adeptly snaked logs from the woods. With his horses hitched to the timber, he talked them to a hauling wagon without even touching the reins. They might have considered themselves human as he softly spoke commands such as "Come on, Babe," "Haw, Sam," or "Walk, don't stumble."

this community and the impact it has had on our current society. See Page 4 for his first article in the Black History series this month when he talks about Sharon's history."

Though quite small, he and his yellow corncob pipe were "very strong."

Such men worked or played whatever their condition. Though handicapped, Clifton "Crip" Winston fulfilled his job responsibilities. No safety net existed then.⁴⁸

Smith next introduced black railroad hands. Generally those big, powerful fellows dressed in overalls and flannel lined coats with long johns underneath in winter. Irrespective of weather circumstances, they moved the cumbersome crossties. Naturally the creosote was hard on their skin and their respiratory systems.

Sharon produced a thriving strawberry business. Among the white Sharon strawberry growers were Charlie Edwards, Oliver Jackson, and Russell Jones. Pickers converged there to pick the high quality berries. Black Sam and Vera Evans brought their 7 boys and 3 girls to that ingathering. Likewise, black Sam and Leona White of Martin had 6 boys and 4 girls. Later their son Henry White excelled at painting, according to former painter Smith.

The fruit went downtown in wagons or "A" model trucks. There produce companies bought those for shipment northward. Perhaps Sharon was a general shipping point because Dresden and Gleason growers transported their wares there, Smith wrote.

Foster Brooks was another contributor to Sharon's success. He operated a chicken hatchery, a livelihood that was generally quite significant

⁴⁸ Col. Bob Smith, "Breaking through the divisions," *Weakley County Press*, February 7, 2008, p. 4.

years ago. The business produced the following chicken breeds: White Leghorns, Rhode Island Reds, Plymouth Rocks, and Dominiques. The latter were often called "Dominnecks" or Dominneckers." Brooks had turkeys and "foul of this nature." God also saw fit to have black chickens, Black Monarchy and Black Giant. Immediately Smith asked, "Can I get an 'Amen.'"

Blacks Shelly Evans and G.W. Clemons knew the procedure well. They put fertilized hen eggs in a heated brooder until the hatching. They placed the chicks in wire cages in a room with a hot pot-bellied coal stove. In a few days they boxed them for shipment throughout the country.⁴⁹

Smith also told Sharon residents about their history in cold February, 2008, at the Sharon Senior Center. Smith paused for a moment to pray before giving tales about citizens who helped Sharon prosper in the early 1900s. He reiterated his often stated perspective that there cannot be history without telling about all races. The few racial differences in Sharon were handled relatively easily. Further, inhabitants were usually industrious and hard working. Cooperative persons made life much easier. Smith himself promoted unity and respect, a combination that paved the way for most people. Similarly, he could only present the past and possibly speculate about the future, but could only live presently.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Col. Bob Smith, "Black community helped Sharon grow," *Weakley County Press*, February 12, 2008, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Sabrina Bates, "Bob Smith tells Sharon seniors of city's colorful history," *Weakley County Press*, February 19, 2008, p. 1, 4.

Understandably Smith called attention to Sharon ministers. He first discussed the powerful Rev. J.D. Evans who became ordained January 24, 1971. His pastorates were in Rives, Tennessee and several Kentucky churches. A heart attack lead to his retirement from Oakton, Kentucky. Others were Garlan White and Tony White, the latter being a superb gospel songster. Rev. E.N. Coleman had preached at Pleasant View Baptist Church since 1982. Ray Elinor constructed a new worship center there in 1994 at a lower price than other bidders, a fact that blessed him. Smith personally knew that and wished blessings on him. Similarly the Colonel praised the deacon board. He was definitely impressed with the choir's fervent singing. Plus blacks and whites worshiped together.

Meantime the Sharon Church of Christ hosted the Marshall Tharpes over 28 years. They joined other members in "jovial fellowship and unfeigned love." Smith rejoiced God's invitation is for everyone.

More generally James and Elaine McDonald were meaningfully active in congregations and civic groups around the county. The effectiveness of their message and other Christians resulted from lovingly cooperating broadly.

Blacks faithfully fought in the military. Allegedly their men served with Confederate forces, even Uncle George Love of Sharon. Moreover, reportedly Weakley County blacks were with the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill in Cuba. Jessie Clemons was in World War I, being one of 3 military generations. Some veterans like Donnel Jones and James McDonald hesitated to discuss their military

tenure. Smith admiringly observed, "That's why we have unsung heroes" whose dedication he appreciated.⁵¹

After Smith's visit to the Sharon Senior Center, in a letter to the editor he reported the fond memories of Mrs. Alean (perhaps Aileen) Edwards about Sharon blacks. Her husband Mr. Edwards knew the writer throughout his life. After earning her degree from DeKalb University in Illinois, Doris White, the daughter of the Henry Whites, was teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University. Another female White family member devoted herself attempting to continue Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church.

Smith wanted to at least highlight the names of unforgettable Sharon beacons for other generations. They were John Henry Hall, James A. Bowers, Sellas Tansil, Elvis "Dago" Jones, Mrs. Etta Mae Boots Wilson, Ray Elinor, Clarence "Fireball" Evans, Jerry "Jerk" Evans, David Roberts, Herbert Tansil, and Calvin Petty. The Colonel singled out Ellis Love as "the town's plumber."

Smith applauded some then current Sharon denizens. Mrs. Martha Jim Roberts readily passed along history bits. Other informants were J.D. Eoteria Evans, Joe Jones, Pete and Georgia Evans, Pauline Tharpe, and Link (Tharpe?). Graciously he also thanked Sabrina Bates of the *Weakley County Press* for her coverage at the Senior Center.⁵²

⁵¹ "Loyal patriotism," *Weakley County Press*, February 21, 2008, p. 18. This article has numerous marks of Smith's writings. A photo of Smith accompanied it.

⁵² Col. Bob Smith, Letter to the Editor, *Weakley County Press*, February 28, 2008, p. 4.

In 2009 Smith admiringly ventured to Latham. Decades before whites had taken blacks from other states to sell there to farm, keep house, and tend youngsters. For this episode he chose to use the solid research of Weakley County Historian Patsy Nanney Baker. Thankfully she shared her research about Candice Collier "Aunt Cann" Stovall. In fact, Baker summarized "'Aunt Cann' Stovall Recalls Memories of Near Century Life," the 1954 reporting of Eleanor Jeter for Heritage Notes. By then Stovall was already a 97 year old black woman in Martin living between Neal and Olive Streets. Prior to cars being common that location was called the Hitch Rack or Hitchrack where shoppers tied their horses. Later houses filled the place. Even at that age, when not doing routine things like repairing a dress, the fully white haired Aunt Cann frequently ambled down Lindell Street. Just in passing an observer would not know she had many memories and stories.

As Jeter related, Stovall was born to slave parents on a Latham area farm. Interestingly they did not belong to the same owner. Stovall believed her longevity possibly resulted from her mother having Indian ancestry, particularly if the old Indian proverb was correct that "some Indians live forever." Stovall's mother and uncle lived in North Carolina before being sold to Weakley Countians. Young Cann worked long and hard without shoes on her master's farm during the day and assisted her father afterward. She remembered many cold days with practically frozen field mud numbing her toes. Naturally a warm fire was abundantly welcomed.

She satiated her appetite with roasted peas or "ash cakes," a salt and meal mix cooked in ashes.

Sometimes at night she produced clothing for at least a baker's dozen family members. Proudly she lived longer than any others.

Her memories went back as far as the Civil War and immediately after. Federal soldiers commandeered horses, food, and, when possible, money. In anticipation of the demand for currency, the cash had already been stashed in a riding boot beneath the house floor. Once the owner's frisky little canine dragged it out and played with the boot without exposing the treasure.

Cann held her own bad memories of Ku Klux Klan terror during Reconstruction. At least twice their riders showed up at her father's dwelling. One time the frightened girl ran to hide in some brush. Cann claimed to remember seeing merchants bidding on slaves at an auction.

Understandably her life changed through the years. In her mid-teens she married. Following her mother's passing and her dad marrying again, around World War I she moved to Martin. She worked as a domestic with different families. She actively worshiped at Miles Chapel Church. She had a daughter, 2 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren.

In the 1950s she remained as active as possible. Understandably she had cataracts though her sewing was slowed only until "someone will thread my needle." Amazingly she did not wear spectacles. Equally interesting she still had a lot of her own teeth. By then her only income came from her monthly government pension. Yet, she willingly

shared her memories to interested hearers, recollections that would otherwise have been lost.

Baker appreciated Jeter's collecting Aunt Cann's memories. The Weakley Countian recognized, "Although there are some discrepancies, research has proven much accuracy in the wise musings of Aunt Cann." Baker then gave her evaluation. With a bit more specifics she confirmed Candice's parents Josiah (a.k.a. Joseph) and Mary Butcher were born in North Carolina in the 1830s, married in Weakley County during 1866, and registered in the 1870 census as domestics, meaning maybe they were considered above general workers. However, according to the 1870 census Candice was a one year old while the 1880 enumeration put her at age ten among 8 kids in the J.C. Butcher home. That 1880 roll listed 11 kids of the Colliers, but no longer in the Butcher residence and some 2 houses away in farming and house keeping respectively.

No one knows the reasons the Colliers originally stayed at the Butcher address, loyalty or economic need or otherwise. Baker realized that black families found freedom meant also the heavy burdens of meeting their own great responsibilities.

Soon Candice was going her own way. In May, 1886, she and Cap Stovall were wed by black Rev. Richard Dunlop, a founder of the black Price's Methodist Chapel in Gleason, Tennessee. According to the 1880 census, Cap was a 14 year old Tennessee born farm worker, whose parents were born in Alabama. Yet, in that decennial list he was with the Josephus Latham family.

By 1900 the Stovalls had a separate listing and children Husk and Chelley. Unfortunately two other youngsters had died. Then Cap worked in a sawmill. Strangely Candice's birth date was given as November, 1875. There was also a 20 year old single boarder who worked at a sawmill. Researcher Baker contended that it was unusual for such records to lower a young person's age.

Baker speculated Candice's monthly income might have been perhaps \$80. Her death date is uncertain though it likely was the late 1950s.⁵³

In 2010 articles Smith directed his thoughts toward rural Weakley County people who have shared their blessings. He still maintained that all races should be included. In this instance, he drew upon his friendship with white Woodrow Collier. He was a man of Christian devotion and integrity knowledgeable about Mt. Pelia, a small community west of Martin near the Obion County line. In the early 1800's his great-great grandfather Beverly C. Collier resided in Middleburg, the settlement's name then. It retained that appellation until it got a U.S. post office during 1840. Because another Middleburg post office already existed, the West Tennessee place became Mt. Pelia, or sometimes Montpelier.

By 1885 a hundred people resided there, serviced by a couple of general stores, a grocery, a saloon, 6 blacksmiths, a Masonic lodge, 2 churches, and a school. Somewhere in the mix was a drug

⁵³ Col. Bob Smith and Pansy Nanney Baker, "Looking Back: Black History Month," *Weakley County Press*, February 10, 2009, p. 1, 4.

store owner unqualified to fill prescription, so the prescribing doctor had to fill it himself.

The Mt. Pelia bank served a dual role. Orin Jackson cashiered an institution of only \$2,500 and displayed caskets configured like bass violins. The absence of undertakers meant residents often handled burials, a fairly common thing at the time. Jackson also operated a general store with a soda fountain and commercial brand ice cream.

As Martin grew, Mt. Pelia inhabitants moved eastward. Smith listed the Blakes and the Bowdens without further identification. Among the departed were Doctors W.T. Lawler and George W. Dibrell, the latter having been there 20 plus years.⁵⁴

In a later edition Smith added further information. Around 1830 James P. Edwards, termed a missionary from Troy, Tennessee, started the Mt. Pelia Baptist Church practically on the Weakley-Obion County line. Whether the first structure was made of logs or not, a storm wiped it out about 1900. Likewise, a storm marred its replacment. About 40 years later the congregation erected another building at the original site where Warren Hill ministered half-time. Soon services were held there each Sunday. In the 1950s the congregation bought an acre of land for a new sanctuary in the mid-1960s. Around 1970 an education edifice replaced the former auditorium. In 2010 Bill Williams shepherded 295 members.

The Mt. Pelia populace notably value education. They early had teachers R.M. Boundurant and J. Lewis. The community eventually

⁵⁴ Col. Bob Smith, "Memories of Mt. Pelia," Weakley County Press, February 2, 2010, p. 1, 4.

developed a school of at least four teachers that was among the best in Weakley County. By 1930 it housed a high school in a special school district. However, Mt. Pelia lost its school during a 1940s consolidated arrangement.⁵⁵

Col. Smith disseminated more information about Mt. Pelia the next week. Actually he borrowed the first portion from Virginia "Miss Jenny" Vaughan, the late Weakley County Historian, beginning with the Church of Christ. In the mid-1870s Daniel R. Rivers of Middle Tennessee migrated to Mt. Pelia for the rest of his life. By working hard he got rid of saloons and began the Church of Christ congregation, becoming the first minister. During 1897 the Church of Christ bought half interest in the local Masonic Hall. Probably the congregation worshipped on the first floor and the Masons met on the second. In accordance with the contract, the congregation automatically gained full ownership upon the lodge dissolving. The church recycled their old building materials to erect their new edifice around 1920. At that time their leaders included Arvie Caudle, Albert Duncan, and Bart Tanner.

⁵⁵ Col. Bob Smith, "Memories of Mt. Pelia," *Weakley County Press*, February 4, 2010, p. 1. The Press had above the story line "Celebrating Black History Month," but at the end of Smith's writing added, "This information is part of the Tennessee County History Series," volume 93 by Virginia Vaughan, *Weakley County*, Charles W. Crawford, editor, Memphis State University Press, 1983. The Tuesday edition of the next week would be about the Church of Christ. Page 6 carried an invitation from the Martin Senior Adult Center about Black History on February 15, 2010 with Dr. Frank Black speaking and Col. Bob Smith as master of ceremonies.

Then there were names of early community immigrants. Mr. Beverly Collier was interred in the Collier Cemetery supposedly in 1806. Others were George and Jim Averys and the Daniel Caldwell family. As previously indicated, Martin lured residents away in the 1900s. Yet black families lingered as worthy stewards of nature. Smith knew during his young years the older generation spoke well of those individuals.

According to Smith's information, blacks knew Mt. Pelia by another name. Possibly speaking of the general area they called it Shadtown. Supposedly it derived from Uncle Joe Shad, a noted black man who learned law by himself. Maybe his humor and reputation kept some guilty blacks from serving jail time, the Colonel speculated.⁵⁶

A week later Smith opened with some prominent Mt. Pelia resident families. First, he introduced Uncle George and Alice Crutchfield. He followed about their children Eva, Tommy, A.F. Kinsey, Floyd, J.B., and Bruce. Bruce's sons were Samuel and Joe Louis. A sustained association existed between the Crutchfields and the Vowell lumberbarn of Martin, beginning in the 20th century. Joe Louis served for 37 years until his 1992 retirement and relative George Crutchfield labored also there. Second, Smith introduced the Caldwells. The Crutchfields and Caldwells both had French ancestors and agricultural work in their backgrounds.

⁵⁶ Col. Bob Smith, "Memories of Mt. Pelia," *Weakley County Press*, February 11, 2010, p. 1, 6.

Next, Smith saw fit to give some personal reminiscences. He dubbed Mt. Pelia "the sweet potato capitol of West Tennessee." The Bell brothers, big yam producers, sent their truck to Martin to round up harvesters in October to mid-November. Driver Barney Agnew handled the human and plant loads. Through purchase Jody Jacob replaced the Bells. In reality, he was more diversified, growing strawberries, dealing in mules, pulling logs with his oxen, producing hogs and cows and hay. The Colonel readily trumpeted Horace Alexander whose grocery peddled eggs and live poultry. For a time he had the Three Point Grocery before settling in Martin to sell Ford vehicles. His sons continued as dealers except two made their names in real estate. In time Rex Pate and Howard "Happy" Garner headed P & G Grocery. The former was also into auto repair.

Three Point Grocery was on the migration route. Willie "Bumpy" Brooks and Harold Foley were proprietors once, but more recently black Freddie Brasfield took it over. The Mt. Pelia grocery of Hollis and Avery Littrell eventually evolved into Steve Nunn's gristmill. Their mill employees were Carl Bryant, Walter Callicutt, and Bobby Phelps, one of the last workers there. Reputedly on cheese and crackers he labored harder than satan. If so, Smith believed our country required more like him.⁵⁷

The next week journalist Sara Reid, now Rachels, recapped Black History Month as celebrated at the Martin Senior Center with Colonel Bob Smith at the microphone, Dr. Daniel Donaldson

⁵⁷ Col. Bob Smith, "Memories of Mt. Pelia," *Weakley County Press*, February 18, 2010, p. 1, 14.

at the piano, and Dr. Frank Black at the podium. The former UT Martin Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, a black professor, premised that Black History Month should be continued. He insisted, "America needs to acknowledge that African-American history is American history and its importance as a knowledge base for all citizens." The country was then far from such realization, so retain the annual emphasis. In his view "to be ethnically different in this country remains a problem." He agreed history classes contained too little black history. Sadly many states had not moved properly for greater inclusion. So, Black firmly believed the observation "helps solidify and build on racial gains, helps rebutt inaccurate and hateful stereotypes and helps us to fight for a Black future."

Reid gave further background. Black educator Dr. Carter G. Woodson initiated the observance in 1926 as only a week. He and others pinpointed February because it marked the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, a famed black activist and contemporary of President Lincoln.

Smith seconded informing young blacks and whites about the black background. Otherwise, in his smooth baritone Smith lead in singing to the accompaniment of optometrist Donaldson. The Colonel's black friend Patricia McDonald, a poet herself, recited James Weldon Johnson's "God's Creation," a sermon in poetic verse.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Sara Reid, "Black History Month Celebration," *Weakley County Press*, February 23, 2010, p. 1, 14. Internet sources really label Johnson's work as "The Creation."

Smith followed up other Mt. Pelia residents who migrated to Martin. Wilson Vaughn, Loyde Vaughn's son, went into the household appliances business and repaired radio and television sets. Afterwards he specialized in interior decorating. Clyde Miles and later his sons Clyde Brock, Ryan, and Douglas did electric related work as did W.D. Winstead and sons Bill, Joe, and Ralph. Burt Milner and Harry Brooks successfully concentrated on real estate. In construction trades Rufus Miles did carpentry while Marshall Hazelwood painted. Thomas Milner and other citizens were Sealtest milk deliverymen throughout the county. The Colonel saluted Fred Buchanan and Hollis Littrell for their World War II flights past Dover's white cliffs of England. The song-loving author, a WWII Navy veteran, could not resist pointing out the 1940s song, "Blue Birds Over the White Cliffs of Dover" was popular due to the significant fighting there.

Smith deliberately turned to the Mt. Pelia women who performed so well. Their initiative and energy were irreproachable. Their Home Demonstration Club produced "palate-pleasing food" which won over many a guy.

Smith thanked all the memorable Mt. Pelia people of the present and past. He wrote also about individuals who helped provide information. Those listed were County Mayor Houston Patrick, Martin City Recorder Chris Mathis, Marshall and Sarah Hazelwood, Mira and George Boyd, Woodrow Collier, and Howard Garner.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Col. Bob Smith, "Memories of Mt. Pelia," Weakley County Press, February 25, 2010, p. 1, 14. According to Internet

In Smith's first outing of 2011, he greeted readers near and far for their complimentary responses. He then deemed it appropriate to present "roses" to the many brave black women who lighted the way "during our struggle through the dark tunnel of life." Similarly white females demonstrated loving concern. He paused, however, thanking God for being in the hearts of His people. The Colonel was sure God answered those praying slave individuals, some of whom lifted their petitions unheard otherwise even in cornfields. God "heard their cry and pitied their every groan. The people's prayers helped bring down the walls of racism, tyranny and hate."

Referring to persons in an accompanying story photo, Smith marked their definite commitment to education. While appreciating the hard seasonal toiling of their black fathers, those leaders aspired to better for their progeny. Those mothers assisted anyway they could to get their little ones through school.

Before clothes washing machines were common, many blacks laundered clothes for whites. Cora Lee Brown, whose children were Willis and Blanche Brown, did laundry day and night. Blanche's son Herbert Brown and young Smith got a dime for returning large loaded laundry baskets irrespective of distance or temperature. Herbert got his moniker "Sham Mammy" from cleaning and waxing cars. Those moms were teaching virtues of work, a point the author hoped youngsters caught.

sources, the title of the 1942 popular song is "(There'll Be Bluebirds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover."

Smith contended laundering was an art form for some artisans. Sometimes clothes were hung out for rain water to rinse them and drip dried inside. "Aint" Charlotte Vincent ingenuously carried a basket at each side and one on her head. Occasionally John Thorkmartin drove the laundry persons to their destination in the two-horse grocery wagon of the West Tennessee Grocery Company. The hack was the property of T.H. Farmer, a very prominent Martin businessman and civic leader.⁶⁰

The next week Smith immediately spotted Mrs. "Mama" Randle and Betty Lawler. The former nurtured countless kids. As a midwife, she brought many into the world in lieu of a doctor and irrespective of monetary ability. Mrs. Lawler was into sewing clothes for children unable to purchase such. Her money came from piano and voice teaching when not directing the choir at Oak Grove Baptist Church.

Among others Zoda May Sanders assisted people as a nurse, funeral director, hairdresser, and notary public. Ella Busby was a partner in Busby Enterprises. Whether from business or personal taste, braced with gold teeth through a broad smile, she stood out in mink furs, in fur trimmed hats, and in new cars. Mrs. Vera Taylor tended children, particularly Inez Shane of Greenfield and Pearl White of Dresden, in her large, well-maintained house.

Not surprisingly the Colonel brought in Pearl Hayes, "one of the most dedicated and determined teachers that Weakley County Training School ever

⁶⁰ Col. Bob Smith, "Black History Month Spotlight: Strong Women," *Weakley County Press*, February 3, 2011, p. 1, 4.

had." Successful completion of her 8th grade class, assuredly qualified students for high school. Musically she played piano well and handled the Oak Grove Baptist Church choir through the years. To commemorate her memory Colonel Bob and Gwen Smith placed a sign with her portrait in the Martin Beautiful Adopt-A-Site on Smith's vacant Fulton Street lot. Martin artist Les MacDiarmid recreated her image from a Smith photo.

Smith also held in high regard Mrs. "Marvelous" Martha Chandler. Her children were John, Will, Joe, James, Edd, Solomon, and Robert "Kid" Chandler and also Homer J., Fanny May, and Carrie Willard. She reared her brood as a strict disciplinarian which relieved their quiet father of many worries. Smith longed for more obedience and fewer fatherless families.⁶¹

The Colonel continued his "Strong Women" in his February 24th column. Specifically he championed Gir Wagner, the only black registered nurse in Weakley and Carroll Counties as early as the 1920s and perhaps into the 1960s. She assisted Dr. "Monigue" Lay in the black hospital on North Lindell Street. In later years locals called it the Big Hall. If an emergency exceeded Dr. Lay's immediate capabilities, a white doctor assisted him, a situation helping promote better black-white relations. In the same service vein Wagner assisted in delivery of black and white babies, often without compensation from the financially strapped.

Next, Smith focused on his mother-in-law Viola

⁶¹ Col. Bob Smith, "Black History Month: Strong Women," Weakley County Press, February 10, 2011, p. 1, 6.

"Tot" Willoughby. She notably served her church with pies, cakes, and, "her delight," ice cream. She sternly disciplined her ten offsprings and any visiting kids who asked for any of her outstanding desserts. Yet, everyone liked her.

Nor could Smith overlook church women. First, he spotlighted "Magnificent" Mag (family name?) who oversaw the youth recreation after church. She resided on forty acres at least a mile west of town. Kids were all along the road up to her house. Among them was Bo Dodd, a white boy well liked by many black guys, especially Colonel Smith. Her kindnesses to tots, including varied refreshments, made her a mother figure.

Next, Smith showered attention on devoted women of his Miles Chapel Church. They were Mrs. Sallie Atkin, Willie Burdettte, Bethel Smith, Emma Martin, and Wilsie Fulton Mildred, and Sallie Milligan along with her three girls, Georgia, Elnora, and Leora. That congregation produced Sister Ollie B. Willoughby Wynn, "Reverend B" or "Miss B" to many, who guided various West Tennessee congregations. She was the sister of Gwen Willoughby Smith, the Colonel's wife.

The Colonel broadened his list with the McCabe United Methodist Church women. Yet, at first he only specified Aunt Jane Shepperd of the 19th century, the mother of Sue Carter. Famously Ms. Shepperd faced down her ex-pastor after the church board dismissed him. The showdown happened a week after the congregational dismissal. When he tried to barge back into the church building past Shepperd, convincingly "Aunt Jane laid a broom upside his head." Other

dedicated faithful were Gabrielia Jones, Jessie Hopper, Reola Cook, Aunt Charlie Williamson, Ozora Busby, Vera "Miss Dittle" England, Golda England, Cora Taylor, Valerie Busby, Lee Busby, Pearl Busby, Pearlie Mae Warren, and Rudell Warren. Nora Royster became known for her spirited shouts from the call to worship through the benediction.

Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church authenticated its share of courageous ladies. Those were Betty Rogers, Ma Price, Emma J. Thompson, Ula Freeman, Ethel Webb, Linnie Long, Effie Grimes, Bulah Davis, Hazel Lawler and Lucy May "Aunt Jemima" Atkins. The last named concocted a superlative barbecue sauce, unsurpassed by no one "not even me and that's saying a taste," Smith humbly added.⁶²

Author Smith clarified some earlier information about black-white medical cooperation. Dr. Robert W. Brandon, Sr. performed surgery at the black hospital when Dr. Lay was away. Brandon constructed the Weakley County Hospital in 1924. That infirmary had black Daisy Rogers as its cook. Her husband George Rogers serviced the Brandons for 60 plus years. The grateful Brandons gave them a house on Old Fulton Road. The physician's generosity extended to Effie "Cavitt" Jones in lodging and in covering her taxes and insurance till her death. Like his father, Dr. Robert Brandon, Jr.

⁶² Col. Bob Smith, "Black History Month: Strong Women," *Weakley County Press*, February 24, 2011, p. 1, 6. Downing remembers that Miss B was an evening custodian at UT Martin. For years she drove a large Lincoln with a personalized plate "RevB." or "RevBWynn."

demonstrated similar gratitude to Inez Hancock and subsequently to Mable Dysart.

Grace Beard, a generous white woman of Martin and wife of autodealer Viron P. Beard, extended her legacy of kindness. She willed things to Doris Owens, Willie Gardner, and Bob Smith. The Colonel's superb work for different employers obviously impressed Mrs. Beard. Violet and George Dodd were tightly bound with Emma Martin. The black domestic felt so strongly she wanted to be Emma Dodd. The couple gave her a house.

For forty years Frances "Ralston" Howard resided in the hearts of the Clarence Dodds whose daughter became Marilucile Dodd Counce. She was family and treated much more than a cleaner.

Smith articulated high praise for his longtime white friend Mary Lynn Benson, a loving and compassion being for blacks. She compensated employee Doris Owens with a monthly check for the rest of her life.

Over 30 years Hazel Lawler ingratiated herself cooking and cleaning for Minnie Douglas and her son Arthur. His will left money to black workers Hazel Lawler, Will Fulton, Gallien Fulton, Ruben Randle, and the Colonel.

Like many others, Smith's sister Wilsie Fulton did multiple jobs, even laboring at UT Martin 40 years. Whatever the specific relationship, Nettie Nall Hilda Thurman gave Wilsie her 406 Fulton Road house.

Helen Royster toiled mightily for Mrs. John Elrod keeping house, being a nanny, and working otherwise there. The latter owned the Merry Lee Dress Shop in downtown Martin on Lindell Street, stocked with quality appareil selected in the New

York market. Over the years Elrood gifted many outfits to Helen.

In wrapping up the series about "Strong Women," Smith characterized them as "the most appreciative people" residing in the exceptionally friendly Martin, Tennessee. God blessed him with life to relate the profound love "shared by both races."⁶³

Mr. Smith devoted his 2012 Black History Month articles to the Miles Chapel Church which "is God's church, where everybody is somebody but 'Christ is all.'" It originated in the late 19th century when freed blacks needed a worship place. Some compassionate white Methodists, aware of the exclusionary effects of segregation, invited blacks to worship with them. Unfortunately the Ku Klux Klan reacted by burning churches, so whites gave black Christians a parcel at Lindell and Jackson streets near downtown. Consequently there has been a church there since 1879.

Smith's narrative traced the black congregation's history back to "Mother Liberty" Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Jackson, Tennessee, in December, 1870. Two years afterwards that group organized Lane College of Jackson which housed the C.M.E. seminary. At the time blacks of northwest Tennessee either went to Lane or not at all. That college got substantial financial backing from small churches such as Miles Chapel which annually gave to help pay tuition fees for needy students. Actually Lane provided

⁶³ Col. Bob Smith, "Black History Month: Strong Women," *Weakley County Press*, March 1, 2011, p. 1, 4.

young and old ministers to congregations like Miles Chapel.

Smith knew a couple of other worship structures had been at the Lindell-Jackson intersection. One burned during the mid-19th century and the other was about to be condemned. Likely with a replacement in mind during the 1913 Memphis Conference at Miles Chapel, the host pastor got the bishop's permission to receive an offering. The \$49.80 donation was seed money toward worship in the new brick building during 1924.

The Colonel saw fit to print the deed contents whereby the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church received specified land for \$165.00 cash. Acting for the church, the trustees were G.W. Haynes, J.P. Phelps, B.F. Haynes, and Mark Parham. At least twice the name of Mrs. Fannie McCombs was mentioned with property touching the CME purchase. Smith grabbed a moment to explain that his young black guys had played baseball with her white son Holland McCombs. Her Freeman family kin provided west Martin property for the creation of the Baptist Hall-Moody College.

The writer had a twofold purpose for mentioning the deed and McCombs items. First, he depicted the closeness of the black-white races then. Second, he illustrated a few determined people like the trustees together furthered God's plans. Smith mentioned several of their great-great grandchildren were alive in 2012: Spencer Haynes; Claxton Lairy; Bobby Phelps and son Bobby Joe who regularly supported Miles Chapel through attendance of offerings;

Lansing, Michigan's Elmer Joe Phelps and Florance Phelps Lue, Oscar Phelps' daughter. The Colonel was greatly impressed with the Phelps generally for their praying and singing.

Miles Chapel members shared in construction. Black fellows were: Jim Parham, Tom Dumas, Raz "Pap" Dumas; Rogers Dan Parham, whose kin donated Parham Cemetery land on Highway 22; Grover Busby, who joined Miles Chapel; and Odell Smith and Doug Haynes who plastered the walls. In 1973 Bob Smith updated plastering, and Claude Howard Charles "Charley P" Pearson put in a ceiling. Through the years "Uncle" Al Clemons dependably fired the old pot-bellied stove, possibly supplying fuel when the church could not afford coal. Numerous instances white businessman Walter Travis donated loads of coal for service warmth. Along the way white lumberman John Vowell contributed materials. Whatever the relationship otherwise white Armstead Stafford cared for Johnny (Burdett?) and his spouse. He received the name "Field Mouse" due to his tiny size. Supposedly moved by the Holy Spirit, he closed his eyes and walked on the top edge of pews during services.

Predictably Miles Chapel members loved music. On his guitar Al Clemons did his favorite songs "Back Back Train" and "Get Your Load, I'm Going Home On the Morning Train, That Evening Train May Be Too Late." During the early 1930s the number of Miles Chapel singers was greater than other black choirs in Martin. Through the years those persons encompassed Annie B. Strayhorn, Odell Smith, Willia Burdette, Eddie B. Clark, Leroy Taylor, Henderson Caldwell, Collin Graves, Mitchell Southall,

and Gerene Moody who took music at UT Martin. Perhaps out of modesty the Colonel did not mention himself.⁶⁴

Naturally Smith named pastors. On the long list were Sam Britt, F.M. Dickey, Mose Meriweathers, Earl Whitlow, Dewitt Douglas, R.L. King, Walter Debro, L.M. Rowsey, R.A. Allen, Al Crawford, A. Richardson Doss, Dan Adams, Jack Hunter, William Jarmon, Mario Murphy, Robert Copeland, Terrence Miller, and Dr. Russell Morrow.

Over the decades members reached Miles Chapel in various ways. "Uncle" Leander Erving, Oscar Phelps, and the Parhams arrived in wagons, buggies, and on mules though others walked. Either way they went in all kinds of weather, sometimes traversing four to five miles. At worst times to protect youngsters, parents covered them with tarps, and with good planning got there in time to warm by the stoves. Later up to a dozen individuals piled into jalopies to get to the Jackson-Lindell location.

Many contributed by different means. With assistance from at least the George Dodds, Emma Martin baked delicious cakes with proceeds toward debt payments. Her fondness for that family showed in her smiling response when she claimed to be "Miss Emma Dodd." With unmeasured devotion Tommie L. Diggs played piano, chaired the annual building fund tea and functioned as a trustee. After

⁶⁴ Col Bob Smith, "Church's history is deeply rooted," *Weakley County Press*, February 9, 2012, p. 1, 9. Smith correctly indicated Collin Graves was not related to white Dr. Neil Graves of UTM. However, he put Dr. Graves in the Music Department rather than in English. Smith could understandably make that connection since Graves often played piano around Martin.

the loss of her spouse Jerry Diggs, she persuaded J.W. Campbell, a white Martin contractor, to put in new windows for specially low prices. Generously he and his son-in-law Keith Pettit gave lots of turnip greens to Miles attenders.

Naturally Smith thanked God for those abundant blessings and many others. Black Ann Ervin Brown drained money from her till to fill needs of others. In the same way her sister Norma Ervin Jones of Lansing, Michigan, graciously remembered her former congregation.

Smith's gratefulness encircled white women, too. Evelyn Blythe, Donna Winstead, Mary McConnell, and Virginia Weldon won his praise. The last was a former Martin Mayor. Furthermore, at Miles Chapel her grandson Brady Weldon preached his first sermon in his teenage years during the 1980s. Dr. Ann Looney Cook, a UTM Home Economics professor after 1970, donated to the first fundraiser tea in 1971 and ever since. Even after her retirement to hometown Cookeville, Tennessee, Smith annually got a call confirming a check for May's third Sunday.

Smith praised other white contributions. Shortly before her death Mary Pritchett spoke at the Women's Day. He accounted Lenny Travis, Grace Beard, and Mary Bonnie Dodd as valued angels. Departed men also got ink, namely Beckcum Ryan, James Riley, Jr., Elmer Counce, once Martin Mayor H.C. Brundige, and Bill Pritchett of Dresden. Still around are the Vowells of Vowell and Sons, a lumberyard company, and County Mayor/Reverend Houston Patrick. For years General Supply's late George Harrison and son David permitted Miles

members to use their vacant parking lot. Smith's deceased boyhood pal George "Bo" Dodd donated to Miles Chapel over 35 years. Vocalist Dodd rendered "Follow Me" at Leander Ervin's memorial service. A Martin doctor contributed annually, but Smith identified him only as "Dr. Automobile." Sharon electrician and plumber Ray Ellnoir's service came pro bono. Yoder Brothers Construction Company freely labored on the Miles fellowship hall as did Martin's Dan Donaldson and his associated M. M. Mission Ministries. Long before retiring from Goodyear of Union City, Reverend Donaldson pastored a black church near Humboldt, Tennessee.

Practically predictable, Smith could not pass up fellow blacks Billy R. Turner, Emanuel Easley, and the late Edd Crockett without indicating their church affiliation though Downing believes they worshiped at McCabe Methodist Church of Martin.

While Madison County Methodist early nourished Weakley County, Miles Chapel moved forward volutionarily, Smith recorded.⁶⁵

Lastly in 2012 Smith chronicled Miles Chapel males who achieved locally, nationally, and internationally. Locally Old Fulton Road mortician-

⁶⁵ Col Bob Smith, "Pastors, members keep hopes alive," *Weakley County Press*, February 23, 2012, p. 1, 14. Several times the Colonel shared that he was in Downing's neighborhood acquiring greens from Pettit. Downing believes Brady Weldon preached his sermon in the 1980s rather than the 1970s. In the 1970s Downing's son Lee and Brady would at most have been only 9 years old. Once Smith indicated to Downing that Miles Chapel reduced its stipends to Madison County because the latter contributed so little to the Martin congregation.

owner William Baskerville maintained his funeral home. Nationally Smith extensively tracked the Jack Thompson family of Webster, Missouri. Mozell Thompson gave birth to Jack in Martin. While here he attended both Miles Chapel C.M.E. Church and Weakley County Training School. To widen his horizon, he settled in St. Louis where he and Betty formed a marriage of 45 years by 2005. They and their four children operated the Kwame Building Group. They also distinguished themselves in community service and in 2004 was a St. Louis black weekly newspaper's Family of the Year. That year the St. Louis mayor hosted a ribbon cutting for the downtown Jack Thompson Square which contained the corporation headquarters in the renovated building. On the first floor is Club Isis, a jazz venue, and well above eight apartments.

Thompsons were involved throughout the business. The oldest son Tony founded the company and presided over the company. He was busy with an improvement project at the St. Louis airport and toward the new baseball Cardinals Stadium. Tyrone Thompson served as a Kwame group vice president. The former area police chief headed the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group. With a legal background the youngest son worked as Kwame Executive Vice President. Outside business he functioned in a political action committee and the St. Louis Nonviolence Coalition. Daughter Sonja co-owned the Club Isis.

Betty Thompson possessed her own thoughts. Sometimes she expressed those as the Missouri District 72 State Representative out of St. Louis. She believed husband Jack definitely motivated the

family. Foremost also in her opinion was their union teaching their children to "reach one, teach one and never forget from which you came." Not surprisingly she was a motivation speaker, too.⁶⁶

Smith next featured Dr. John Wayne Diggs, the Gleason born son of the deceased Jerry Cornelius Diggs and Tommie Lou Diggs. Four years later the Diggs relocated to Martin near a downtown railroad section yard. Young Diggs attended the Weakley County Training School before attaining a B.S. at Lane College and advanced degrees at Howard University. At the Association of American Medical Colleges in Washington, D.C., in 1993 that vice president was involved with biomedical research issues. Before then he was with the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Earlier he had directed a National Allergy and Infectious Diseases division which targeted AIDS in especially critical areas. He died in Maryland in 1995.

Brothers Tommie and Cornelius Diggs devoted themselves to teaching. Following graduation from Lane, Tommie taught at Greenfield, Tennessee, until drafted during the Korean War. After marrying he took a job in the Detroit public schools developing young people first in the classroom and then in middle school administration, a total of 40 years at retirement.

⁶⁶ Note: Similar information appeared in 2005 as "Weakley County's Thompson family awarded honor in St. Louis," *Weakley County Press*, February 17, 2005, p. 4. It was unsigned. One of the few indications Smith might have participated in the article is that the Thompson family was among Martin's oldest families including Busby, Tansil, White, Williamson, Crutchfield, and Smith.

Cornelius was the third brother to graduate from Lane. It prepared him for the elementary grades, and he and his new bride taught briefly in Weakley County. The instructors completed their careers in Decatur, Illinois. Proudly Smith injected he had taken the Diggs boys to the Saturday B-westerns at Martin's Capitol Theater.

The Colonel's cousin Carmack Smith went to Miles Chapel, the Weakley County Training School, and Lane before teaching in Gibson County. He continued his studies at UT Martin and Tennessee State University. Through 20 years he was a Trenton Housing Authority officer and for 15 years a Gibson County Election Commissioner. His members included Gibson County Teachers Association president, Alpha Psi, and Phi Beta Kappa. In 2012 he entered the Gibson County Football Hall of Fame. "Mack" and his wife had been married 57 years, had their son Michael, and had two grandsons. The author's postscript was "Way to go cuz."⁶⁷

Colonel Smith decided on Weakley County motivators in February, 2013. He opened thankful to his God that he could compose another article to show Him in compassionate Weakley County hearts irrespective of race. He reminded readers that slaveowners John Gardner and William Martin located in Weakley County during the 19th century with slaves D.C. Martin, the Arnolds, and the Wilkins. During the 1860s on August 8th Tennessee slaves celebrated their emancipation on Gardner's Terrell Grove farm by barbecuing hogs. The cooks and

⁶⁷ Col Bob Smith, "Celebrating Black History, Church helps build stronger people," *Weakley County Press*, February 28, 2012, p. 1, 14.

other celebrants were ancestors of notable Martin residents Bob, Dave, and Vonnie Wilkins. It was similar to the main dish that Aunt Jimimi produced almost till 1970 topped with her unsurpassed sauce on flesh tended by her husband. Their Hyndsver Road cooking pit was just barely north of the Lindell Street intersection. Decades after Wilkins' kin along with Bille and Mama Grace Smith shared their culinary knowledge with youngsters. The older fellows stoked the fire in the ground pit covered by fence wire to hold the meat.

To fill the time revelers intoned songs such as "In the Evening by the Moonlight." It was easy to hear all ages of "those 'darkies' singing" with banjo accompaniment. Parenthetically Smith would have avoided the word "darkies," but it was, nevertheless, historical to that age. He pointedly stated, "Think not what man calls you. Father God calls us his children, and us singing has always had harmony with our fellow man." The fellows got their meat on around 4 p.m. At that time they stewed up a large container of "Pluck & Plunder." In it they seasoned white potatoes, onions, and hog livers with red peppers and salt sage. They consumed their completed dish with corn bread from a cast iron skillet. Having finished that, some older guys secreted themselves for a bit of "mule" home brew or "ruckus juice," so named after the song "We're Gonna Raise a Ruckus Tonight." The more boisterous might have really meant hell.

The group really policed itself which relieved police chief Walter Morgan of that duty. Black enforcer Ollie "Jack Johnson" Royster's imposing presence spoke for itself. His son James

"Big O" Royster was a Martin policeman from 1969 through 1979.

In addition, at such gatherings and in neighborhoods women and men motivators of both races modeled discipline and decorum. Smith wished that were still true. Those citizens motivated Smith to write about families who provided work and taught skills as did the Meek family. The butchering of livestock prepared guys like the Caldwells, Myles, and Pattersons for meat plants in Union City, Memphis, and St. Louis. Levi and Persy Bend processed sausage for John Gardner's Walker County Sausage and one time Martin mayor H.C. "Ham" Brundige's hog business.⁶⁸

Smith resumed scanning meat processors other than H.C. Brundige. The unincorporated Gardner contained two plants. Grady Capps and his brother-in-law Burnie Powers had one while Norving "Big Boy" Glasgow and his son Robert Neal operated the other. In later years Glasgow became a Martin city administrator before being a general sessions judge.

The Glasgows entered processing just prior to U.S. entry into World War II. Federal government rationing hit such companies hard in addition to limiting sugar, tires, shortening, cigarettes, whiskey, women's hose, and beef. Some people like Glasgow substituted goat flesh which went into burgers. Those handlers slaughtered and butchered hogs, cows, and goats, and occasionally processed even coons, and poultry. Their sausage and

⁶⁸ Col Bob Smith, "Weakley County Motivators, A look back with Col. Bob Smith," *Weakley County Press*, February 5, 2013, p. 1, 5.

chitlings were tasty. That Gardner store furnished chitlings to Doug Murphy's party friends or "dirty dozen" as Smith termed them. Such companies delivered throughout the county.

The Glasgow's hired Gilbert H. Campbell, Huey "Snooks" Edwards and his brother Elmer Edwards, and Don McCollum. The Glasgow's teaching helped those black hands to excell as butchers in the county.

As in the past, Smith thanked "God for the good ole' boys" who gave the black fellows a vitally needed work skill. Butcher Ronnie Campbell became owner of the slaughter house lot on Summers Street. Isaac Glasgow got into the sausage business by mixing ingredients in a No. 2 washtub at his Highway 22 house in Dresden. After school his teenage daughter Susie Simms sacked sausage for him to peddle throughout the vicinity. In 1951 he got a nearby building for butchering hogs, cows, and goats. Along the way Glasgow trained young black Wayne "Cootie" Evans from killing to finished product for "an honest and well-deserved living," an opportunity for which Smith was thankful.

Other prospects existed. Landowner and produce man Walter Travis gave five and six year olds three cents a quart to harvest strawberries. Travis' adult supervisors John "Papa" Hayes, Herman Arnold, Will "Pappydoll" Milner, Bob Fulton, and George "Judge" Allen trained the children properly and kept them responsible. Thereby the minors earned money for clothes "from one of the most helpful dry good store owners in Martin."

Joe Shatze owned the \$1.98 store. Child harvesters bought apparel on installment with half a dollar initially and then weekly. Smith learned more about Shatze from his own mother, a 7-day cook at \$6.00 a week at Mrs. Ila Collier's Boarding House on Oxford Street. He allowed Mrs. Smith to pay what she could when possible. The Colonel continued, "This type of love was helpful to struggling mothers and to young boys and girls growing up in a world of uncertain direction." Smith listed several other stores with the interesting observation about D. L. Gardner's "going out of business sale twice a year."

Businessman Roy Estes hired black kids to assist Lloyd High deliver groceries to cafes and houses. Black teenager A.D. Willoughby clerked for Estes and packed delivery containers. While High drove, A. D. sat on the truck tailgate alongside the tethered kerosene. Estes had black kids take care of the floors and haul trash to the alley. Though their compensation was little, it was preferable to begging or stealing. Estes had boxing gloves which were used for two boxing matches a week. The winner got anywhere from nickels to quarters. To Smith the reward showed the boys "some things are worth fighting for."

Smith was so proud he could share about the worthy efforts of whites and blacks.⁶⁹

Among the businesses that hired black workers was Vowell & Sons which had a history of

⁶⁹ Col. Bob Smith, "Weakley County motivators: Part 2, A look back with Col. Bob Smith," *Weakley County Press*, February 7, 2013, p. 14.

black Thompsons or Crutchfield for much of their existence. Joe Louis Crutchfield was the last representing his family as was Rod Thompson. At Brooks Produce the dock foreman and truck driver were white with the other ninety percent black. Changes were in the offing when George Brooks' nephew Arthur Douglas expanded black responsibilities. Thereafter, black truck drivers Gallan Fulton and Rubon Randle transported products to distant large cities. The Brooks family was prominent in Martin, George having been a mayor. Bob Smith knew of Mr. Brooks through his longtime friend Jack Brooks, George's grandson.

The operator of Stafford Milling company Armstead Stafford taught up to ten blacks to grind, mix, and pack hog and cow feed.

Prominent Jack Vincent held forth as Martin mayor during the 1950s. He played a big part in blacks being hired at Martin Manufacturing, a garment factory. Melvin Vincent, Jack's son, had black hands at his farm, sweet potato building, and beer distributorship on Church Street.

Then Smith brought in Doug Murphy, "the most vibrant, colorful and unforgettable mayor of Martin." Beneficently the funeral director laid to rest many profoundly poor blacks. He markedly supported the Martin Tigers baseball team many years, even buying equipment for the financially strapped players. Smith stated, "To be frank, Murphy was a Tiger himself." Other black causes benefitted from his generosity. He particularly befriended black Martin "Britches" Bigham at the Murphy Funeral Home. The young fellow wanted to be a mortician. Carefully tutored by Murphy, Martin

excelled as a Tennessee funeral director, Smith recorded.

Completely aside from being mayor for most of the 1960s, Murphy was a prankster. One year Viron Beard, a Chevrolet dealer, held an outing at Paris Landing. Smith prepared the barbeque for the occasion. Bob Brandon provided a speedboat for Murphy to operate. The latter promptly invited the cook for a ride, and they really roared off. At the end Murphy asked if the jaunt had scared him. A negative surprised the questioner who had consumed some beer. Without telling anyone, Smith had downed several. In Smith's opinion Doug's kindness and compassion still lived in his son David Murphy who "makes it easy to love the friendly undertaker."

With a proper approach some youngsters learned they could get rewards from delivery carts. Sandy Smith's ice wagon provided a prime example. A helping hand and good conduct could earn a kid rag bologna and a Nehi soft drink. Sandy's hidden special drink really stimulated his spirits despite kids not seeing him swig.⁷⁰

In March, 2013, the Colonel ran his last article of the year. Black Gene Busby represented a positive role model through the low income housing program Hope of Martin.. Similarly he thanked Paul Clark of Pepsi for everything he did for Martin and a long list of black operatives, Paul Wilkins being one. Besides, they treated young boys via small jobs at that plant. His son was James Earl Wilkins who

⁷⁰ Col Bob Smith, "Weakley County Motivators, Part 3, A look back with Col. Bob Smith," *Weakley County Press*, February 26, 2013, p. 1.

labored at The Hearth for at least 27 years. Smith thanked the white Thweatt family, the current eatery owners, for their concern and support of James Earl. During that span the latter also devoted himself to his church and city. Hopefully James' story would encourage those seeking employment.

The Colonel highly praised his lifetime friend and educator H.T. Conner, "the best Weakley County motivator that black and white students ever had." During his UTM administrative span, Conner still was greatly influenced by Wilson Vaughn, a white interior decorator. Blacks Joe Rooks, Bobby Scott, and Big Ken Edwards definitely owed their apprenticeship to Vaughn.

Smith moved further to thank other constructive families without designating race though they likely were African-American. There were the Boyds, Brights, Brents, Claybrooks, Donaldsons, Harrells, Griggs, Simmons, Turners, Belotes, Trenthams, and Wests.

Predictably black ministers motivated many. Those reverends were Alvin Summers, John Williams, Russell Morrow, Paul Jenken, Orin Cowley, and Brother Nate Holmes, all ministers in Martin congregations. Smith inserted R.C. Nunley among them. In addition, he was a teacher, farmer, antique dealer, cattleman, and general trader. Smith regarded Nunley as "heaven sent to our town." As was R.C.'s descendent Robert Nunley who literally mentored and motivated black youths after school.

Smith expressed additional thanks. He hoped deceased community leaders were comfortable in God's heaven. He wished the living to be blessed

forever. He appreciated Martin Beautiful and M.M. Ministries for improving Martin's attractiveness. He treasured interaction "with such elite personalities." He was grateful to *Weakley County Press* Editor Brad Gaskins for picking up his articles at Cane Creek, where the Colonel was rehabbing from an injury. Nor did he forget the kindness of Cane Creek personnel. Lastly, he thanked all who read his articles.

The newspaper editor added: "The Press thanks Col. Bob for sharing his knowledge and insight with our readers. He is a true community leader."⁷¹

Perhaps the Colonel realized that would be his last article. For a number of years he experienced different health related issues. Usually he rallied from those until late July, 2013. Many people are better off that he composed his recollections to share with anyone who would read them. We are better off for having known and read about Colonel Robert Wallace Smith.

⁷¹ Col. Bob Smith, "Weakley County Motivators: Part 4," *Weakley County Press*, March 7, 2013, p. 16. Nate Holmes played football at UT Martin and was one of Downing's early survey History students there. For many years he has been principal at the Martin Middle School. One February Colonel Smith invited Downing to a Black History observance at the Martin Senior Citizens Center where Robert Nunley gave the address. He spoke briefly because he had to get to his neighborhood for his children, all the school kids to whom he ministered. Actually, he and they sort of "adopted each other," Downing added.



Bob Smith

(From JPHS Website posting, February 28, 2010)

About the Author:

Marvin Downing is the current Treasurer of JPHS and a History Professor Emeritus of the University of Tennessee at Martin. Marvin and his wife, Sandy, live in Martin.