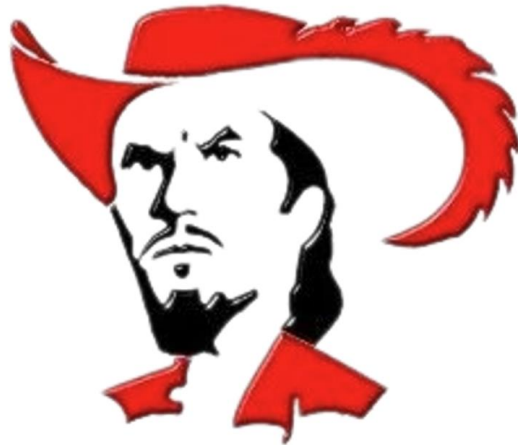


**Freedom of Choice Students  
Chatham High School**



Anderson, Ella Wease	Davis, Janice	Jone, Jean Carolyn	Skates, David
Bennett, Hugh Cary	Fitzgerald, Andrew	Jones, Clarice	Smith, Dinah
Bennett, Isabel	Fitzgerald, Clifton	Jones, Evangeline	Tanner, Clarissa
Bennett, Phillip	Fitzgerald, Elizabeth	Jones, Gloria	Tarpley, Alfrita
Bowman, Lindell	Fitzgerald, Irene	Jones, Windell	Taylor, James
Bradner, Wayde	Fitzgerald, John	Logan, Johnny	Taylor, Phyllis
Brown, Jay	Fitzgerald, Lillie	Logan, Robert	Taylor, Stanley
Berger, Joyce	Fitzgerald, Martha	Lovelace, Charles	Thomas, Edward
Carter, David Lewis	Fitzgerald, Velma	Roosevelt	Word, Sammy
Carter, Cecelia	Fitzgerald, Wayne	Lovelace, Danetta	Wharton, Carolyn
Carter, David	Fitzgerald, Willie	Lovelace, Daniel	White, Cornelius
Carter, Edward	Galloway, Elbert	Lovelace, Julia	White, Jack
Carter, Glenn	Gee, Jacqueline	Luck, Walter	Wilson, Charles
Carter, Gloria	Guy, Nancy	Marr, Patricia	Witcher, Dolly
Carter, Henry	Guy, Teresa	Oneal, Janice	Witcher, Juanita
Carter, Jewel	Harris, Carol	Price, Annie	Witcher, Mike
Carter, Paul	Harris, Carroll	Price, Moses	Witcher, Randolph
Carter, Sammy	Harris, Coleman	Robertson, Ernest	Womack, Deborah
Coleman, Myra	Harris, Wilfred	Robinson, Betty	Womack, Larry
Coles, Arkie May	Henry, Dottie	Robinson, Edith	Womack, Ruby
Craft, Alfonsa	Hightower, Willie	Robinson, Edith Marie	Wright, James
Craft, Cynthia	Hodnett, Juliet	Robinson, Nancy	Wright, Jimmy Lewis
Craft, Walter	Hodnett, Marilyn	Robinson, Patrice	
Davis, Carol	Hurt, Thomas	Shelton, Michael	Teacher Fred Fowler
Davis, Eva	Jackson, Wanda	Shelton, Wanda Fay	

# FREEDOM OF CHOICE

**CHATHAM HIGH SCHOOL - FEBRUARY 17, 2024 - 1:30 PM**

**SELECTIONS**

SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION

**WELCOME**

MRS. MARGIE RICHARDSON

**PRAYER**

REV. RAYMOND RAMSEY

PASTOR, GREATER MT. PARISH BAPTIST CHURCH

**GREETINGS**

DR. MARK JONES

SUPERINTENDENT PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY SCHOOLS

**STATEMENT  
OF PURPOSE**

MR. MICHAEL BROWN

FREEDOM OF CHOICE COMMITTEE

**MOMENTS OF  
REFLECTION**

MRS. JANICE OVERBY, FORMER WORLD LANGUAGE TEACHER, CHS

MR. FREDDERICK FOWLER, FORMER TEACHER, CHS

MR. PAUL CARTER, FREEDOM OF CHOICE STUDENT

**SELECTIONS**

SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION

**SPEAKERS**

EVANGELIST RANDOLPH WITCHER

MRS. CLARISSA KNIGHT

**SELECTIONS**

SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION

**UNVEILING OF PLAQUE - LOBBY**

FUNDING PROVIDED BY DANVILLE REGIONAL FOUNDATION

# FREEDOM OF CHOICE STUDENTS

CHATHAM HIGH SCHOOL - FEBRUARY 17, 2024 - 1:30 PM

ANDERSON, ELLA WEASE  
BENNETT, HUGH CARY  
BENNETT, ISABEL  
BENNETT, PHILLIP  
BOWMAN, LINDELL  
BRADNER, WAYDE  
BROWN, JAY  
BERGER, JOYCE  
CARTER, DAVID LEWIS  
CARTER, CECELIA  
CARTER, DAVID  
CARTER, EDWARD  
CARTER, GLENN  
CARTER, GLORIA  
CARTER, HENRY  
CARTER, JEWEL  
CARTER, PAUL  
CARTER, SAMMY  
COLEMAN, MYRA  
COLES, ARKIE MAY  
CRAFT, ALFONSA  
CRAFT, CYNTHIA  
CRAFT, WALTER  
DAVIS, CAROL  
DAVIS, EVA  
DAVIS, JANICE  
FITZGERALD, ANDREW  
FITZGERALD, CLIFTON  
FITZGERALD, ELIZABETH  
FITZGERALD, IRENE  
FITZGERALD, JOHN

FITZGERALD, LILLIE  
FITZGERALD, MARTHA  
FITZGERALD, VELMA  
FITZGERALD, WAYNE  
FITZGERALD, WILLIE  
GALLOWAY, ELBERT  
GEE, JACQUELINE  
GUY, NANCY  
GUY, TERESA  
HARRIS, CAROL  
HARRIS, CARROLL  
HARRIS, COLEMAN  
HARRIS, WILFRED  
HENRY, DOTTIE  
HIGHTOWER, WILLIE  
HODNETT, JULIET  
HODNETT, MARILYN  
HURT, THOMAS  
JACKSON, WANDA  
JONE, JEAN CAROLYN  
JONES, CLARICE  
JONES, EVANGELINE  
JONES, GLORIA  
JONES, WINDELL  
LOGAN, JOHNNY  
LOGAN, ROBERT  
LOVELACE, CHARLES ROOSEVELT  
LOVELACE, DANETTA  
LOVELACE, DANIEL  
LOVELACE, JULIA  
LUCK, WALTER  
MARR, PATRICIA  
ONEAL, JANICE  
PRICE, ANNIE

PRICE, MOSES  
ROBERTSON, ERNEST  
ROBINSON, BETTY  
ROBINSON, EDITH  
ROBINSON, EDITH MARIE  
ROBINSON, NANCY  
ROBINSON, PATRICE  
SHELTON, MICHAEL  
SHELTON, WANDA FAY  
SKATES, DAVID  
SMITH, DINAH  
TANNER, CLARISSA  
TARPLEY, ALFRITA  
TAYLOR, JAMES  
TAYLOR, PHYLLIS  
TAYLOR, STANLEY  
THOMAS, EDWARD  
WORD, SAMMY  
WHARTON, CAROLYN  
WHITE, CORNELIUS  
WHITE, JACK  
WILSON, CHARLES  
WITCHER, DOLLY  
WITCHER, JUANITA  
WITCHER, MIKE  
WITCHER, RANDOLPH  
WOMACK, DEBORAH  
WOMACK, LARRY  
WOMACK, RUBY  
WRIGHT, JAMES  
WRIGHT, JIMMY LEWIS



## Randolph Scott Witcher

What is your name and age? Randolph Scott Witcher- 72

Where did you grow up? Woodlawn in Chatham, VA

Which school did you attend? When? I attended Chatham High School from the Fall of 1966 until Spring of 1970.

What was your experience with the integration in the schools? My experiences were mixed. We went to their school. Some white students liked and accepted it and some didn't. After the first year, most students accepted it. Blacks greatly improved the extra curricular activities at Chatham. This included athletics, Chorus, band and other activities. There were some negative incidents but I tried to ignore them.

If you were a part of "Freedom of Choice", why did you choose to attend a white school? I chose to go to Chatham High because it was much closer than riding the bus to Northside. It took me an hour to get to Northside and I could be at Chatham High in ten minutes. I brought information home from Northside concerning Freedom of choice. I discussed it with my mother. We decided that I would go to Chatham High along with my younger sister. I had one brother and one sister that stayed at

## **Narrative of a student who attended Chatham High during the Freedom of Choice Era**

During the spring of my seventh grade year my parents made the decision to send me to Chatham High (the recognized white high school) and not Northside High (the recognized African-American High School). I know that this was not an easy decision and my feelings weighed heavily in the final determination. Why? I don't know after all I was a 13 year old child who depended on my parents for my very existence. Several other students who were close friends decided to attend the "white" school too.

As I remember there was no fear nor overwhelming anxiety. We felt the same apprehension that all eighth graders feel as they enter high school at thirteen years of age. Is this the right outfit? Does my hair look ok? Should I take a book bag? What about lunch, buy or carry? Will I get to my classes on time? What if I get lost?

As the day began, and my parents allowed me to ride the bus, excitement overwhelmed me. After all I had never ridden a school bus. There were several of us African Americans who rode the bus and loaded at the same spot. If the White students felt any animosity they did not show it.

As the year progressed we began to miss our friends. After all our social lives included those students who decided to attend the "black school". We joined the band at Chatham High, we joined choir, and those of us who were athletic played sports. I was fortunate because I played the piano and became the pianist for the choir. The students admired my ability and so did their parents. It was easy for me. However it was not easy for all. We missed the spirit filled athletic competitions at Northside. Boyfriends and girlfriends attended Northside High School. The week-ends were spent with our friends from Northside High School. We attended church with those same friends. However our culture was under attack and there was nothing we could do about it. Sure the "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" era was ushered in and we all wore afros and dashikis. I guess in our immature and feeble minds this helps us believe that we were not intimidated and had a grasp on our history. My grandmother always said "stupid is as stupid does." There is no other word for us but stupid. We thought that symbols made us superior.

The questions were asked and still remain today, why did you go to Chatham High? Do you think you got a better education? Did it prepare you better than Northside for the next level? Are you glad you made that decision? Would you do it again? Have you remained friends with any of your white counterparts from Chatham High?

Once those "Freedom of Choice" students became juniors, total integration was the law. There was significant resentment. The African-American students did not want to be at Chatham High and the White students did not want them to be there. For the first time we, "the freedom of choice" kids had a substantial chance at becoming leaders. We coveted the roles of class officers, SCA officers, Homecoming representatives, Miss Chatham High, editor of the school newspaper and the school year book. For the first time I felt and understood racism. I was not a threat during ("freedom of choice years"). Even though I thought I had the white support, I did not but once I received support from my African-American community along with several in the white community my white classmates were frozen in fear. The term used to describe me was token. As a result of the support from both communities I became All-State Choir, Student Body President, Homecoming Representative, Runner up in the Miss Chatham High Pageant, and the lead in two musicals. I must give a tribute to Mr. Hampton Benton who saw in us (the Freedom of Choice) students talent, possibilities, hope, and bright futures. Out of that group we became, social workers, medical techs, ministers, educators and musicians. It has been a wonderful life. I miss Chatham every day.

## **Juliet Hodnett**

What is your name and age? Juliet (None) Hodnett—68

Where did you grow up? West of Chatham near Grenrock or Huntstown.

Which school did you attend? Chatham High School

When? Fall '67 -Spring of '71

What was your experience with the integration in the schools? She had minor negative experiences but she did not really want to be there because she did not like white folk. She states that she thinks that the world appears to be more racist now than it was in '67 when she went to Chatham under Freedom. Of Choice. She feels that this may have been because of the status of her father in Chatham. He was well known and well respected. It appeared that initially her biology teacher was throwing her papers to her. This immediately stopped after a parent -teacher conference.

Reason For choosing Freedom of Choice: Parents directed her to go.

Juliet said that she is glad that this research is being done and will be made available to the public.

## Henry Lewis Carter

What is your name and age? Henry Lewis Carter 74

Where did you grow up? Hunts Town Chatham, Virginia

Which school did you attend? When? Chatham High School? 65-66 and 66-67 Graduated

What was your experience with the integration in the schools? His experience was not good. You were the Only Black there his first year. Henry stated that students would throw paper, balls, push him or hit him and then deny it. He was sent to the office by the principal and nothing was done. This continued throughout the school year. Nothing good happened that first year. No students or teachers were friendly or wanted to socialize with him. Henry played in the band for his two years at CHS. There was slightly less harassment the next year with more Black students attending. Approximately twelve Blacks attended CHS his senior year. Henry has attended two class reunions. He last attended one five or six years ago. He doesn't know if the class is still having reunions.

If you were a part of "Freedom of Choice", why did you choose to attend a white school? Henry attended CHS because the law allowed it. He wanted to make sure that integration was going to take place. He hoped by doing that that other Blacks would step up to continue integrating Virginia Schools. Henry's parents and neighbors were against him attending CHS. They still felt that Blacks had their schools and whites had their schools. Henry was informed of Freedom of choice through the news media.

What were some of the most challenging aspects of your experience?

What were some of the positive experiences? Henry stated that he did not have any positive experiences at Chatham.



## **Dolly Bass**

In the fall of 1966, after graduating from Central Elementary School, I was given an opportunity under the "Freedom of Choice Plan" to attend Chatham High School, an all white high school in the town of Chatham, VA.

This was a milestone in my life and an experience I will never forget. I was anxious and excited to be apart of something so surreal.

My experience during this transition was met with discrimination as well as acceptance. At no time was I deterred from continuing my high school education at Chatham High School.

My observation of what I endured my first years at Chatham High School was necessary in order to acknowledge the negative/positive impact of integration. Change is not always easily embraced but it is necessary if we wish to advance in our society and continue as a human race.

By the fall of 1969, Chatham High School became fully integrated. I am honored to be among the students who contributed towards the advancement and mission of education equality.

## Patrice Robinson

My name was Patrice Robinson when I was a student. Now my name is Patrice Robinson Harris. My age is 71.

I grew up in Chatham, VA

I attended Central Elementary School, Northside High School (8th and 10 grades) and Chatham High School (9th, 11th, and 12th grades).

I remember being forced to take an English literature class at Chatham High School in my senior year. Other Black students were also forced to take the English literature class. I remember one Black student tried to change her class to another English class because she said that she was going to go to college and needed a better English class. She was not allowed to change her class. When I got to Norfolk State College I was not allowed to take the beginners freshman English class. I had to take two semesters of remedial English classes because I scored so low on the grammar test; therefore, I did not take regular freshman English until I was a sophomore.

I was part of "Freedom of Choice". I chose to go to a White school because my siblings attended the school, and the Black school bathroom was so dirty that I did not want to go in it. The White school bathroom was clean.

The most challenging aspect of my experience in school was knowing that I was one of the poorest students in the school, whether the school was Black or White. In elementary school I rarely had lunch. In the Black high school, I was allowed to work in the cafeteria, and I got lunch for working. In the White school, I got free lunches.

My positive experiences in the White school were getting free lunches and a clean bathroom. Also, I was allowed to take Home Economics in the White school. My sister and I took the same class, and we cooked food. We would choose recipes that had good ingredients. Also, in the Home Economics class I realized that I was brave. The teacher asked us to write down what we ate for breakfast and dinner each day. At first I was ashamed to write down what I ate, then I decided that I would not lie. I wrote down gravy and a biscuit for breakfast, and beans and a biscuit for dinner.

## **Reflections by Marian S. Keyes**

I, Marian S. Keyes, was born and reared in Pittsylvania County. My educational journey began at Lipford Primary School as a first grader. This was an all black two-room school with students from first to seventh grade. There was no transportation for black students who walked to and from school each day.

At twelve years old, I entered the Pittsylvania County Training School, later becoming Northside High School. I graduated at age 16 in 1948 and entered St. Paul's College graduating at age 20. In 1952, I began teaching at Stony Mill Elementary School and was transferred to Northside High School in 1954. I remained a teacher there until 1969 when full school integration began. At that time, I was transferred to Gretna High School where I remained until 1990 at which time I retired.

In the transition to fully integrated schools, I do not recall the encounter of any major conflicts among teachers and or/students. I had a sister and a brother who attended Chatham High School in 1968 - 1969 during the Freedom of Choice period. At that time, they chose to go for the experience and to become a part of the total education experience in Pittsylvania County. The school bus that transported only white students was a convenience to them because it picked up white students who lived on the adjoining farm to my parents. They were able to ride that bus to Chatham High at that time; otherwise, they would not have been able to attend except by their own transportation. In the meantime, my husband and I decided that our son who was going into the third grade in 1967 during the Freedom of Choice period would be transferred from Northside Elementary School to Chatham Elementary School so that he could become adjusted to the integrated system at an early age. During his first year in this system, there were a few problems - one being having to ride on the same bus as the high school students. He was taken advantage of at times, but his dad and I put an end to that by going to the school authorities in every situation and stopping every situation that he was encountering. He adjusted well after that and became a part of the total programs and total integration system.

Before total integration of public schools, nothing was equal in equipment, supplies, facilities, books, etc. in the segregated schools. In the black schools a good job was done with what we had and the situations that we encountered.

As a teacher in an integrated school beginning in 1969, I saw and made no difference in teaching black and/or white students. I saw them all as **students**; it made no difference to me whether they were black or white. I believed in individual help for each student, black or white.

In the 1960's, those students who chose to attend a white only school had to provide their own transportation or go to a nearby neighborhood to catch a bus, as I emphasized earlier in my reflections. Even after integration, there were no black high school principals until 1985. As I remember, Walter Keyes was the first one. Until integration, there were separate black and white county wide teachers' meetings and conferences.

There were only two black high schools in Pittsylvania County before integration, Northside and Southside High Schools. In 1969, they were changed to junior and/or middle schools. When total integration began, I felt that all students and teachers would be receiving the same educational opportunities regardless of race.