

TESTIMONIALS in HONOR of RUTH C. BURT

When the civil rights movement raised anxieties in the community, Burt provided lunches for marchers who were demanding that local retail stores hire African Americans as salespeople, despite the risk to her career.

“She talked like a teacher,” Harris said. “She spoke with a level of energy. When she talked, people listened.”

Interview with the late Dr. Andrea Harris, The Daily Dispatch, May 15, 2015

“She was my elementary school teacher down at Carver School,” Baskerville said. “She was a great teacher, very strict. But through the years I found her to be loving and kind. She was very helpful to me in my career.”

Randolph Baskerville, Retired Judge, The Daily Dispatch, May 15, 2015

Life takes us down winding roads, and, if we keep our eyes open, we are fortunate to find inspiration at many turns. One of the paths on my journey, while I had the pleasure of being the publisher of The Daily Dispatch newspaper, took me to the doors of the Henderson Institute Historical Museum in the mid-2000s and into a deeper friendship with — and appreciation of — its long-time curator, Ms. Ruth Burt. At the time, the president of the Henderson-Vance Chamber of Commerce, Bill Edwards and I, Chair of the Chamber’s Education Committee, worked to enhance the curriculum of the Teacher Executive Institute (TEI). TEI is a chamber program providing opportunities annually for the top teachers from each public school to learn more about the rich heritage of our community, to see what Henderson and Vance County offer our area students in the present day, and to look ahead to see potential for growth and advancement for those students in the future. From her lifelong work as an educator and community volunteer, I’m not sure there was anyone greater for these top teachers to have met than Ms. Burt. We made the museum a regular stop each year for these lead teachers in the TEI. As she spoke with the TEI teachers and Chamber volunteers each year, she radiated warmth discussing her love of teaching and the museum’s history, and she gave us all a renewed understanding of the importance of preserving and celebrating our histories. I’m sorry to say that I had spent a lifetime in Henderson without realizing the origins of the Institute, understanding the challenges faced by its students and teachers and administrators, and appreciating the powerful and positive impact that Henderson Institute had on its students and the Henderson and Vance County community at large. Ms. Burt opened for me a window to a time that is indeed most worthy of preservation. I always remember her soft-spoken, gentle nature, delivering information and insight with a smile. An acquaintance became a true friend, and I will always appreciate the inspiration I received from Ms. Burt.

James D. Edwards, Former Publisher of The Daily Dispatch and Former Director of Communications, Vance-Granville Community College

With Ruth Burt at the center, the concentric circles radiating from her because of the lives she touched is immense. She was never a woman who wanted to be at the center, but for many, she was a central part of their lives because of the care

she took in guiding and helping others. Ms. Burt's lifelong passions were education and history. She made a great impact on others by pursuing those passions. The way Ms. Burt lived her life can be found in the way people who knew her well describe her and the actions she took throughout her life. Former Vance County Schools Superintendent Wayne Adcock described Ms. Burt as "interested in the whole person, not just reading and writing, but how they treat each other." She influenced not just her students but was a mentor for young teachers. Ms. Burt exercised interest in how people treated each other not just in the classroom, but in the broader scope of our society. She provided lunches for civil rights protesters during local demonstrations. She ensured that the rich history of the Henderson Institute, which served African American students until 1970, would be preserved. She served as the Henderson Institute Historical Museum curator for 18 years. Thanks largely to her efforts, the museum was put on the National Register of Historic Places. Ms. Burt devoted her life to teaching, both through history and through her career as an educator. It's hard to envision what Henderson would be like without her. With her death April 27, this community lost a treasure. She leaves behind, though, a legacy of accomplished students who learned not just their lessons, but how to treat others. She also safeguarded an important part of our community's history. She will be missed.

Editorial: "A Final Tribute to An Unsung Hero", The Daily Dispatch, May 18, 2015

Often Aunt Ruth deemed it necessary to impart words of wisdom as I entered early adulthood--"Watch how your friends treat others; remember your day is coming." This sage advice has saved me many times. I miss hearing her lovingly express her one of her favorite phrases, "Shut up Ruth Helen." OH, that lady loved me!

Ruth Helen Wilson, Ruth Burt's niece and namesake

Perhaps this excerpt from the poem, "The House By The Side Of The Road," by Sam Walter Foss best describes Ruth Burt's basic philosophy of life.

*Let me live in my house
by the side of the road
and be a friend to man.*

