

# Parallel to the Past

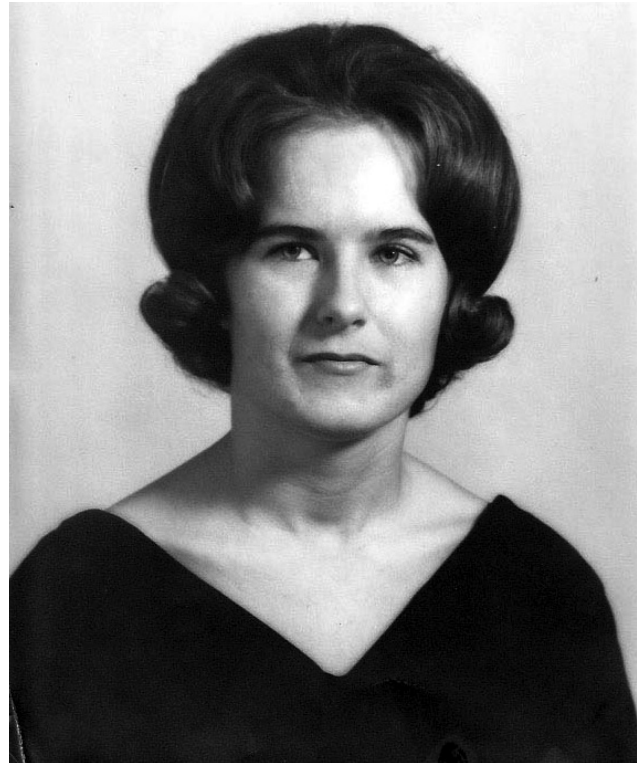
Text by Hanna Schenkelberg

Photos by Jacob Puterko

In 1959, Ann (Frank) Simpson was entering the sixth grade. Rather than returning to a traditional school like she was used to, she was beginning a whole new chapter of her education. Anne was starting school in the basement at Pisgah Baptist Church in Rice, Virginia. Even though the church was no bigger than normal, it held six different grades, all spread throughout the building. "My sister was upstairs, a few grades were down in the basement, and we were in the two classrooms they had on the wings of the main assembly room." Ann went on to seventh grade at Farmville Baptist Church, and finally finished the rest of high school at the newly built Prince Edward Academy.

At the time, Ann had no idea what was going on around her. The years she attended grade school witnessed the US Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board* that declared segregation in public education unconstitutional and Massive Resistance to the decision. She grew up in Rice, Virginia on a small farm with her two parents, two older brothers, and one younger sister. Being nearly twelve miles away from county lines of Prince Edward, Ann and her family had no avenue for knowing what was happening behind the scenes so close by. "We knew the schools closed and that we had to go to school in the churches, that's really it."

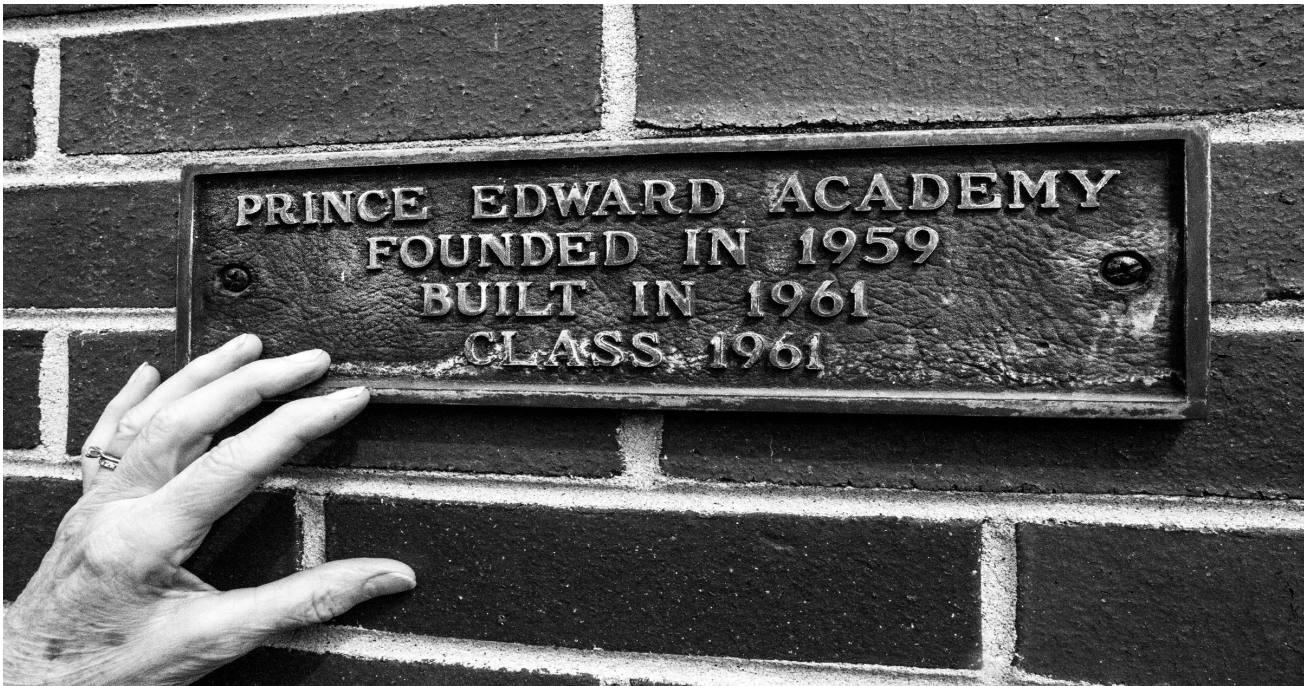
During the mid-50s, "there was no [social] media, and there wasn't that much about it in the Farmville Herald; we would see a blurb every now and then on the Richmond TV channels, but we never really knew the details. I'm not even sure I remember the black schools being closed for that long." Ann's memories of that time include going to school and helping out on the farm: "Growing up on the farm, we had chores. My brothers helped Mom can or freeze vegetables and fruit. Dad would slaughter cows and pigs to provide us with meat, so whatever we didn't grow or raise, we didn't eat. My mom would go to town and she would buy sugar, salt, and pepper. Just the spices. Otherwise, we grew everything."



Ann's senior photo at Prince Edward Academy in 1965.

**"We knew the schools closed and that we had to go to school in the churches, that's really it."**





Ann thinks back to the memories she had at the academy when she sees the memorial plaque of Prince Edward Academy.

Even though Ann and her family didn't know the specific details about what was happening in the present, they would later find out that they had an interesting connection to the past. Ann's great great grandparents were responsible for the education of R.R. Moton, one of the most well-known black men in the United States in the 1920s and 30s and the man after which the Farmville black high school was named.

His accomplishments include succeeding Booker T. Washington as both the second leader of the Tuskegee Institute and as the perceived spokesman for black Americans during the era of segregation. Moton is credited with integrating liberal arts into the curriculum and establishing bachelor of science degrees in agriculture and education.

Moton's father worked on Ann's ancestors' plantation and his autobiography credits her family for his ability to read. "One day, my great great grandmother opened the cabin they lived in, and saw that he was being taught to read and write. The next day, she had assigned my great aunt Molly to go teach him every week." In his autobiography, he mentions that he credits three people for his education, and that was his mother, Miss

Lucy, who was my great great grandmother, and Miss Molly. Back then you weren't supposed to teach blacks, so [to me] that was so interesting."

Ann recognizes that the way Moton and his family were able to live harmoniously with her relatives and the surrounding white families mirrors her childhood experience. She had several black neighbors growing up and remembers always getting along. Ann never recalls feeling like everything happening in town affected her relationships with them. "Everybody respected everybody."

While she may not have known about her family history and the connection in her youth, looking back on it she can really appreciate it. For all the time that the school closings forced separation between races, Ann's home life was never reflected by that.

Looking back on it today, Ann sees the effects of the past still weighing on present day Farmville. "I hate that it continues to this day," she says, "We need to look forward and stop looking backwards."

**"Everybody respected everybody."**

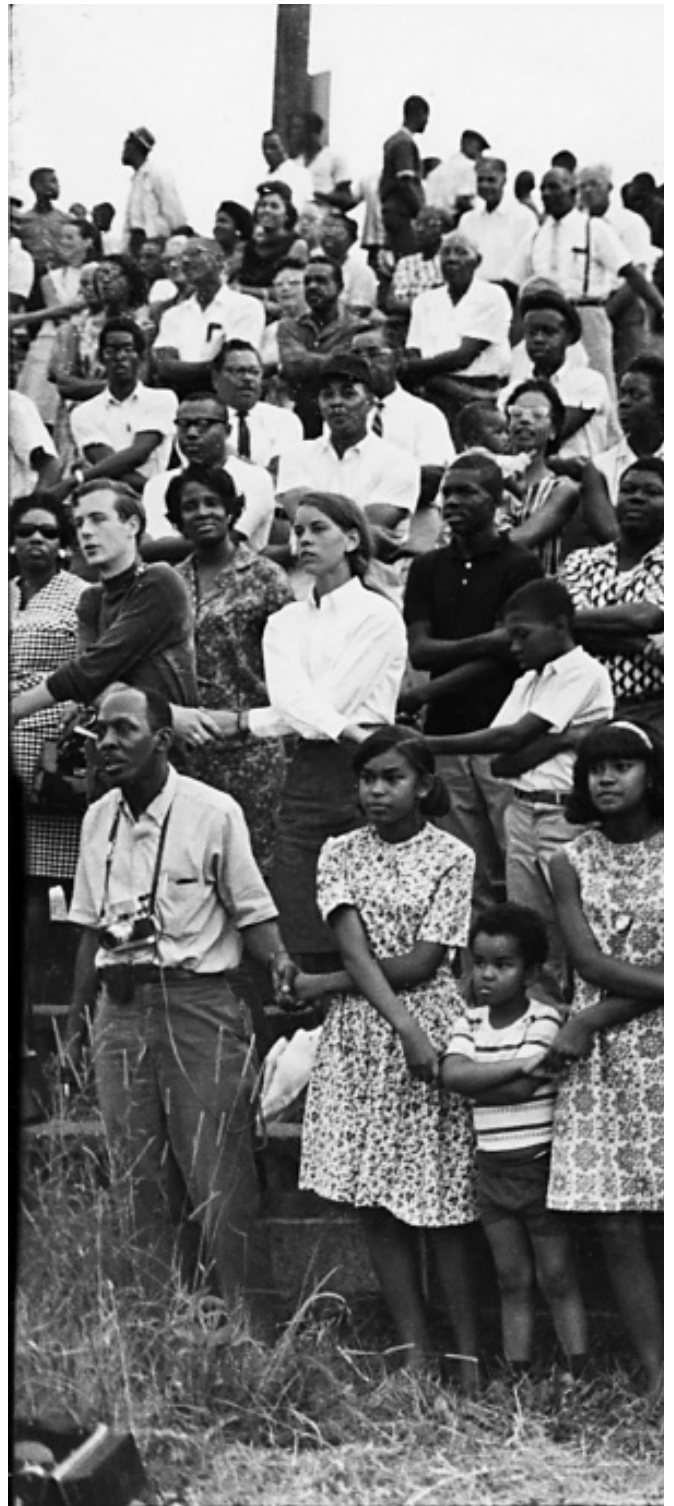


The cabin that Moton's father stayed in while working on the plantation in 1867.

"God made us all equal.  
We need to forgive and forget  
if we can."



Annsits in the Farmville Baptist church basement, where her free school classroom was located.





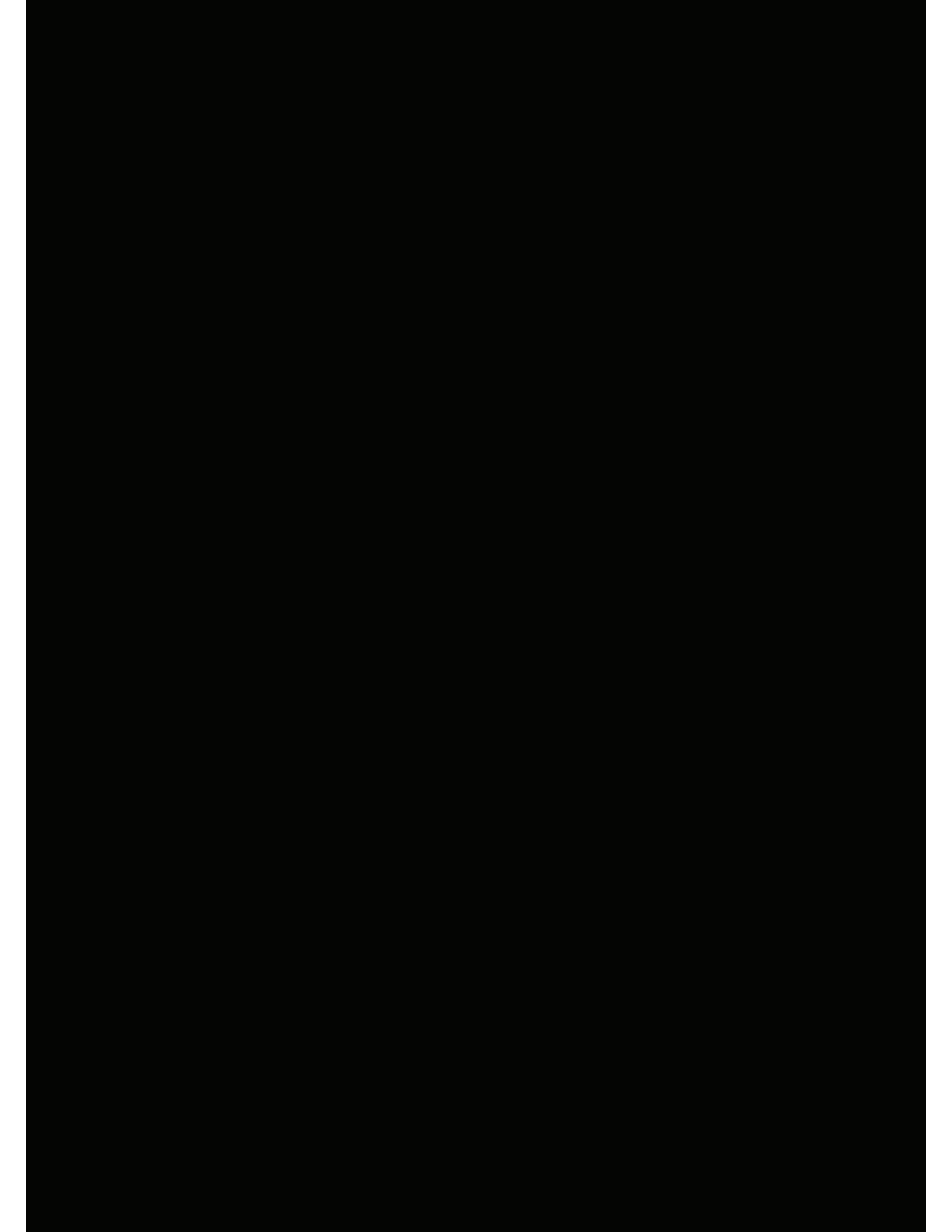
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