

MAPPING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: DANVILLE, VA., 1945–75

1946



Danville Register and Bee
Charles Kenneth Coleman

African American Seeks City Council Post. Charles Kenneth Coleman, head of the local NAACP and the Danville Voters League, becomes the first African American to seek elective office since Reconstruction.

1948

Peters Park Established for Black Baseball. James Peters, Sr., borrows \$100,000 from American National Bank and builds Peters Park, a baseball park for black competitions.

M. C. Martin Files Suit to Desegregate State Parks.

Danville banker M. Conrad Martin files suit to desegregate Virginia state parks.



First State Bank
M.C. Martin, Danville banker

1950

State Park Created for African Americans. Prince Edward State Park for Negroes is established by the state in response to the 1948 desegregation suit filed by M. C. Martin.



Special Collections, University of Virginia
Gregory Swanson of Danville, at left, registers as a student at the University of Virginia School of Law.

First African American Enrolls at the University of Virginia. Gregory Swanson of Danville wins the right to enter the University of Virginia Law School in a federal court suit sponsored by the NAACP.

1954

Brown vs. Board of Education, May 17, 1954. The U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation in public schools is unequal and unconstitutional, overturning *Plessy vs. Ferguson*.



Archie W. Thorpe
A segregated class at John M. Langston High School, 1954.

1956

Senator Harry Byrd, Sr., Calls for Massive Resistance. U.S. Senator Byrd of Virginia calls for massive resistance to desegregation in the South, challenging the Supreme Court's order for racial integration in the schools.

1959

Massive Resistance Declared Unconstitutional. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and a three-judge federal district court declare massive resistance unconstitutional.

1960



Thomas C. Edmunds
Danville Memorial Library, site of a 1960 sit-in.

Black Students Try to Use White Library. Sixteen African-American students in Danville try to use the facilities of the whites-only library located in the Confederate Memorial Mansion. The NAACP files suit to desegregate public facilities.

1963

MARCH 26

King Speaks in Danville. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks at the Danville City Auditorium at an event organized by the Danville Christian Progressive Association, an affiliate of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

MAY 31

Demonstrations Begin. The Rev. L. W. Chase, president of the DCPA, tells white authorities that there are to be no demonstrations. But his colleagues—the Rev. Lawrence Campbell and the Rev. A. I. Dunlap—organize and lead protests, resulting in an open split in leadership.

JUNE 5

Occupation and Ouster at City Hall. Police oust 125 civil rights demonstrators who march into City Hall and the City Manager's Office. Five arrests are made.

JUNE 6

Judge Aiken Issues a Temporary Injunction.

Two hundred civil rights demonstrators march to the Municipal Building. Corporation Court Judge Archibald Aiken, Jr., issues a temporary injunction, later made permanent, limiting the scope of demonstrations.



Corbis and Corbis
Judge Aiken, as a student at University of Virginia School of Law.

JUNE 7

Grand Jury Indicts DCPA Leaders. A grand jury indicts three DCPA leaders under the 1859 John Brown statute outlawing conspiracy "to incite the colored population of the State to acts of violence and war against the white population"; bail is set at \$5,000 each. Negotiations between white leaders and black activists are stymied.

JUNE 10

Bloody Monday. Demonstrations take place throughout the day. In the evening, the Rev. Hildreth McGhee of the DCPA leads a prayer vigil for those jailed earlier. Police react by attacking the vigil with billy sticks and fire hoses; all but three of fifty participants are injured. The day becomes known as "Bloody Monday."

JUNE 11

Ordinances Limit Demonstrations. City Council passes an ordinance that limits the time, place, and size of picketing and demonstrations.

JUNE 13

Police Employ Same Tactics. Police again use fire hoses and clubs on city hall demonstrators. These tactics help to unify the black community and result in national press coverage of the events.

JUNE 17

Trials Begin. By this date, 105 people are under arrest and awaiting trial under the injunction limiting demonstrations. Corporation Court Judge Archibald Aiken, Jr., tries the cases despite grievances by civil rights attorneys about the legal procedures, such as the exclusion of the public from the courtroom.

JUNE 19

Civil Rights Lawyers Seek Federal Court Intervention. Lawyers file a petition to remove the cases on grounds that a fair trial cannot be obtained in Danville Corporation Court. They file suit attacking the constitutionality of the ordinances, injunctions, and measures used to criminalize the actions of the civil rights protesters. Their efforts are, for the most part, unsuccessful.

JUNE 21

Grand Jury Indicts More Leaders. The grand jury indicts ten more civil rights leaders under the 1859 John Brown statute. Bail is set at \$5,000 each.



Danville Register and Bee
Dr. King speaks at High Street Baptist Church.

JULY 11

Martin Luther King, Jr., Comes to Danville. A mass demonstration draws only eighty people and King refuses to lead the march. The stringent legal tactics of white authorities are taking a toll.

AUGUST

Times Cites Danville's Defense Tactics. The *New York Times* cites Danville for having a "defense strategy that is among the most unyielding, ingenious, legalistic, and effective of any city in the South."

Aiken Makes Injunction Permanent.

Judge Aiken makes permanent the temporary injunction limiting the scope of demonstrations, and changes the venue for some defendants, moving their proceedings 80 to 200 miles away from Danville.

Fourth Circuit Intervenes.

The Fourth Circuit restrains trials for violation of the injunction and the ordinance curtailing demonstrations, but lets stand prosecutions for other offenses. Attorneys for the civil rights demonstrators appeal.

In the years that followed, aspects of the Danville cases would be heard in local courts, state courts, federal courts, the Virginia Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court. All would not be settled until ten years later.

OCTOBER 17

Danville Appoints First Black Policeman. At first city authorities refuse to hire a black policeman under the gun of protests. A month after demonstrations end, the city appoints its first black policeman, William Wesley Terry.

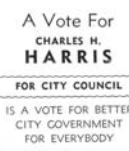
1968

African American Elected to Council.

Charles Harris is elected to Danville City Council, the first black to hold such an office since Reconstruction. Charles Womack, a white moderate, is defeated.



Courtesy of Dorothy O. Harris
Charles Harris was elected to Danville City Council in 1968; he later became mayor.



Courtesy of Dorothy O. Harris
A Vote For Charles H. Harris
FOR CITY COUNCIL
IS A VOTE FOR BETTER CITY GOVERNMENT FOR EVERYBODY

1970



Leon Townsend, Danville Register and Bee
In September 1970, when the black and white schools merged, tensions between the races resulted in a one-day closing.

Black and White High Schools Merge.

George Washington High School (for whites) and John M. Langston High School (for African Americans) merge. The new school is called George Washington High.

1973

Judge Suspends Jail Sentences of Six 1963 Demonstrators. Circuit Court Judge Glynn Phillips suspends the sentences of six protesters, who had been arrested in 1963 and released on bond. Commonwealth's Attorney William Fuller III storms from the courtroom, saying, "I'd rather go to jail than live in a gutless society like this."



Leon Townsend, Danville Register and Bee
Many 1963 civil rights demonstrators, above, were high school students or seasonal workers.