

day, February 27, 1990

THE GREENVILLE SUN

MATURITY

snell, Editor

Local Black History Filled With Civic Minded Business Leaders



Photo by Pam Gosnell

Mrs. Hannah Crum, seated, and her sister Georgia Mae Farnsworth have devoted most of their lives to community projects designed to make Greenville a better place in which to live.

Sometimes history seems dry, but there's nothing dry or impersonal when it comes to the history of Greene County's black community — at least not the way Mrs. Hannah Crum and Miss Georgia Mae Farnsworth of Davis St. tell the story.

Mrs. Crum is 84, Miss Farnsworth 76. Together they represent both a strong spirit of community and family, and a living tie with a major chapter of Greeneville/Greene County's heritage.

Daughters of Lloyd and Jennie Vance Farnsworth, Mrs. Crum and Miss Farnsworth's family resided on Davis St. as children. Of the eight children in their family, only they survive.

The sisters have remained close to each other, and to Davis St.

When Miss Farnsworth left home, she moved across the street and down a few doors. Mrs. Crum moved just two doors away.

"At one time," Mrs. Crum said, "this was almost 'Farnsworth St.'"

One married, one did not. One was active in business, the other in professional life.

But throughout their lives both women have been key leaders in black civic life and in the effort to make Greeneville a better place to live and raise a family, for both black and white citizens.

They have been well known for decades as strong community activists interested in the progress and wellbeing of the entire community.

Miss Farnsworth

Miss Farnsworth, a retired school teacher with more than four decades' service, spent many years caring for her ailing mother.

It was during these years, Miss Farnsworth said, that she decided to become active in community service.

Today she is reluctant to talk about her numerous accomplishments and awards.

"I'm just proud of my life," she said, "I'm proud of Greeneville."

Now limited by arthritis, she is unable to participate in many of the organizations she has helped lead in the past, including the Greene County Heritage Trust, the YMCA and programs designed for crippled children.

The Greene County Skills Board, of which she is a member, is an organization in which she has always been interested. She has always been interested in those projects designed to help children.

A graduate of Tennessee State, which is now Tennessee State University, at Nashville, she remains a member of the Greeneville Education Association.

Recently she was honored for 25 years of service with the Upper East Tennessee Human Develop-

ment Agency.

Among other awards, she has been honored with the Greeneville Exchange Club Book of Golden Deeds, presented for outstanding civic achievement.

Mrs. Crum

Mrs. Crum is the matriarch of a 5-generation family, all of whom live in Greeneville.

"If they all came at once," she said, "the house couldn't hold them!"

In her lifetime, Mrs. Crum has owned and operated several restaurants and a grocery store. She had held a job "outside the home" since she was 12 years old.

When the death of her husband, Willie F. Crum, she went to work for Greene Valley Developmental Center.

Her first post was in the superintendent's office at Greene Valley Developmental Center. When she retired, at age 67, she was supervisor of the dietary department.

After her retirement, she was asked to help establish the dietary department at the Roby Fitzgerald Adult Center when it was first founded. She retired for the second time at age 74.

NWCC

Both Mrs. Farnsworth and Mrs. Crum were charter members and leaders in the Negro Women's Civic Club, founded in 1950.

It is the purpose of the organization, Mrs. Crum said, to "make Greeneville a better Greeneville" and to create a better understanding between the races.

The NWCC is one of the few clubs in Greeneville who have its own meeting hall, which is located beside Mrs. Crum's home on Davis Street.

At one time the club has had as many as 72 members; today, the membership is 30-40.

The NWCC's first project was purchasing \$500 worth of books for the George Clem School library.

Another major project was the building of a community swimming pool at George Clem. Later, when city-supported pools were integrated, the NWCC pool was closed, Mrs. Farnsworth said.

The club has remained active in community projects since its founding date.

Last year, for instance, the organization decided to sponsor a bake sale to raise money for the Dickson-Williams Mansion restoration.

The bake sale turned into a dinner, and the dinner turned out to be a large community event.

Recalled Mrs. Crum, "I don't reckon there has ever been a dinner any bigger than that."

When it was over, the Modern Woodmen matched the club's profits. Together they donated over \$4,000 to the mansion project.

The club serves as official grantee for the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program. It is the

responsibility of the grantee to be responsible for the organization's money.

Today, Mrs. Crum serves as chairman of the RSVP Board of Directors, while Miss Farnsworth serves as the club's parliamentarian.

Black History

Asked to comment on the history of the black community in Greene County and its leaders over the years, Mrs. Crum notes that many events she is too young to remember.

But, she said, her family has told her stories that she remembers well.

Miss Farnsworth commented that many do not know black history because it is simply not taught.

But, she said, among the many who have helped to shape the town of Greeneville, some have been black.

For example, she said, there were men like Roy Fowler, who was a squire, with an office in the federal courthouse early in this century. A squire had the ability to try cases.

Slavery Minor Here

In 1969 Jack Carson Jr., a Greeneville native and a graduate of Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va., wrote a series of articles for *The Greeneville Sun* on Greene County's black history.

His reports stated that, not surprisingly, the first blacks in

grandfather.

Contractors

Lloyd Farnsworth, Miss Farnsworth and Mrs. Crum's father, was a concrete contractor and did plaster work.

It was Mr. Farnsworth and his two sons, Henry and Rufford "Bud," who hand-finished the first sidewalks on Depot Street.

Miss Farnsworth said that her father would "get down on his knees" and trowel the sidewalks. This was done long before the streets were paved, she said.

Brick Masons

The Manuel and the Clem brothers were brick-makers, according to Miss Farnsworth.

There were several brick kilns on Davis St., Mrs. Crum said.

"People would come from miles around," she added, to watch brick masons mold their own brick. "That was black men that did that," Mrs. Crum said.

Dave Manuel, one of the early brick masons, was reported to have been "instrumental" in the building of several area churches, the George Clem School (which now houses the central city school offices), and the Greene County Court House.

Macurio Manuel is the son of Dave Manuel, has continued the family business and is a brick mason today, Miss Farnsworth said.

Restaurants, Grocery Stores

Miss Farnsworth said that there were many restaurants owned by blacks who served both a black and a white clientele.

Roy Ripley, James Clark, Leonard Henderson, Alonza Farnsworth, Will and Lina Duncan, Babe and Maggie Grant, and P.A. Wilson were some of the cooks and restaurateurs in Greeneville in the early part of the century.

John Gass and his wife operated both a rooming house and a restaurant on Depot Street.

Will Briscoe owned and operated two grocery stores. Roy Olden and Bruce Patterson also operated grocery stores.

Barber Shop, Cleaners

One of Mrs. Crum's and Miss Farnsworth's brothers-in-law, Chauncey A. "Pete" Carson, was one of the town's leading barbers.

Carson worked at Patton Barber Shop on Depot Street which served whites. Later, Carson opened his own barber shop.

Arthur Hill and A.Y. Bass operated a dry cleaning shop on West Depot Street, according to Miss Farnsworth.

Leaving Greeneville

When the factories came to Greeneville, Miss Farnsworth said, the companies would not at first hire blacks, although that situation changed years ago.

Jobs were scarce, and this forced many black families to leave Greeneville to look for work, Mrs. Crum said.

"Whole families moved," she noted. "We have families (from Greeneville) in California, New

York, and New Jersey."

Education

According to Carson's reports, the first school on record for blacks was closed in the year 1900; the date of its origin is not known.

This school and the one that followed were operated by the Town of Greeneville.

Before integration, the city and county governments did not provide high schools for black students, Miss Farnsworth said.

There was no high school for black children until the Jones Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and its general church board built "Greeneville College High School," the first high school for blacks in Greeneville.

The school was at first for elementary grades only, with the higher grades added later.

The curriculum reportedly included both the fundamentals and included Latin, Greek, French, higher mathematics courses, and vocal and instrumental musical training.

In 1935, George Clem, well known locally as an outstanding young educator, became principal of the school.

He was the grandson and namesake of an earlier George Clem, who had owned and operated one of the early brick kilns.

In 1939, Clem died, and the school's name was changed to honor him, Miss Farnsworth said.

During the 1950s, all black high school students in both the city and the county were asked to attend Greeneville College High School.

Then, also in the '50s, "We got our new high school (George Clem School) before the city got their big high school," Miss Farnsworth said.

Miss Farnsworth's first teaching job was with Greeneville College School and later at George Clem School. There, she said, she "always had two or three grades" together in one classroom.

In 1966, when the schools were integrated, the George Clem building was rented by the city school board for offices, and the teachers at George Clem School were hired to teach in the integrated city school system.

Miss Farnsworth, Lottie B. Henry and Grayce Bradley, who were teachers at George Clem, all went to work for the city schools at that time.

Ironically, because of the city school zone where she worked, there were no black children in Miss Farnsworth's classes.

"I must say, I never had a minute's trouble with the change from black to white," she said.

After 42 years of teaching, Miss Farnsworth retired from Greeneville Middle School in 1978.

Greene County were slaves. But slavery and the slave trade did not flourish here, he wrote, for "religious and economic" reasons.

Thus, by the time President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, many Greene County blacks had already been freed by their owners.

By the early years of the 20th century, there were many black business owners and skilled craftsmen who had both a black and a white clientele.

Noted Carson in his articles, "All of the Negro businessmen and skilled workmen listed represent only a small fraction of the total number of Negro professionals for that period."

"The stories of many more remain untold. Today little is left to give evidence of their achievements, and only a few people remember them and what they did."

Listed below are a few of the men and women whom Mrs. Crum and Mrs. Farnsworth can remember.

Draymen

Two brothers, Rufus and Henry Vance, were two of Greeneville's leading draymen, or wagon drivers, in the late 19th century. The job was similar to that of a truck driver today.

It was the job of draymen to deliver materials and to transport corpses to funerals, Miss Farnsworth said.

Rufus Vance was Miss Farnsworth and Mrs. Crum's