

Editor's note: In 1963, Black Danville residents took to the streets for months to peacefully protest segregation. They were confronted by the police, often violently, and they faced criminal trials before white juries and a white judge who fought against integration. Until recently, many of their stories were passed over by institutional historians.

The echoes of a civil rights struggle that shook Danville 60 years ago

This weekend marks the 60th anniversary of Bloody Monday, the day Danville's civil rights protesters were most violently confronted by the police during a long summer of peaceful protests. Here's a look back at the history with the people who lived through it.

by **Grace Mamon**
Cardinal News

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Sixty years ago, as summer heat began to build in Danville and racial tension sweltered across the nation, several local Black ministers organized peaceful demonstrations against segregation and racial discrimination in the city. On May 31, 1963, the first protest of the summer went off as peacefully as planned.

But the calm wouldn't last. Like the temperature, tension between the mostly Black demonstrators and the city's all-white police force continued to rise. The summer of 1963 would go on to be defined by a brutal and pivotal struggle for civil rights nationwide.

Some of the worst violence played out in Danville.

Arrests started in early June, and on June 10 — just 10 days after demonstrations began — violence erupted on what Danvillians now know as Bloody Monday.

“Bloody Monday, it was like a nightmare. It was unbelievable,” said Dorothy Moore-Batson, who is Black and, at 18, had just graduated high school in 1963. She, her sister and her cousin participated in the protests each day.

On the evening of June 10, protesters gathered for an evening prayer vigil outside the city jail to support those who had been arrested earlier that day, when the police turned fire hoses on them, Moore-Batson said.

The police chief at the time, Eugene McCain, also deputized garbage men and other city workers to help police break up the protests. The municipal workers were given nightsticks to wield against the protesters.

At the end of the night, at least 47 people had been injured and 60 arrested, according to a historical marker that now stands outside the courthouse on Patton Street. Most were Black.

This is the story of Bloody Monday and the civil rights movement that surrounded it, told by people who were there.

This is also the story of what Danville looks like today, six decades later.

Danville's civil rights timeline

In 1960, three years before Bloody Monday, Black residents of Danville began to push back against the segregated norms they had always known.

Danville was a city of 46,577 residents then, almost 25% of whom were Black, according to Encyclopedia Virginia. Despite the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas ruling six years earlier, Danville public schools remained segregated.

“At that time, Blacks were not allowed to ride in the front of the bus,” Moore-Batson said. “If we went to a public facility, we may not be able to use the restroom.”

And even when separate bathrooms for Black folks were available, they weren't in good condition, she said.

“My mom used to take toilet tissue in her pocketbook in case we needed to go to the restroom,” Moore-Batson said. “Because usually in the colored restroom, there was no toilet tissue. Or they didn't replace it when it ran out.”

Black people were also prohibited from eating at the lunch counters at places like Woolworth's, the ubiquitous five-and-dime chain.

Moore-Batson remembers being unable to eat at the Woolworth's in Danville.

“You could smell the hotdogs and hamburgers, but you just did your shopping because you couldn't sit,” Moore-Batson said.

She doesn't remember feeling upset about these injustices, she said.

“Somehow, we were not sad,” she said. “You just knew that this is how life is. And you just accepted it. But when the movement came, we decided yeah, we want to participate.”

On April 2, 1960, the first sit-in occurred at the Danville Memorial Library, which was not open to Black residents. Sixteen Black students tried to use the library, which is now the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History on Main Street.

In response, the city closed the library. It reopened in September 1960 after a federal court order, but without any tables or chairs.

This same year, civil rights activists in Danville created the Danville Christian Progressive Association, an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s organization.

The association petitioned the city council for more Black representation in government and city services, and activists also fought for integration in schools.

But by 1963, Danville still remained largely segregated. Civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, were gaining momentum

and publicity during this time, and at the end of May, the association organized similar demonstrations in Danville.

Neal Morris, a 24-year-old motorcycle patrolman, was working the police department's evening shift from 3:30 to 11:30 p.m. on May 31 when he rode by the city hall steps and saw "a peaceful gathering," he said.

"Normally, we would be informed of any kind of group activity or gatherings on city property, but no one had said anything about this," Morris said. "I thought it was a church function, honestly, because they were singing hymns. 'We Shall Not be Moved,' that's what they were singing."

He called the department and asked what was going on, and nobody knew, he said.

"That's when we found out that there was a movement beginning," Morris said. "We didn't know how long it would last. We didn't know it wasn't a one-day event. But it turned out to be practically every day through the entire summer."

For the first several days of the demonstrations, Morris would ride on his motorcycle ahead of the protesters and stop traffic at the intersections for them so they could cross, he said.

In the beginning, the police department and the city had no issue with the demonstrations, he said. They were peaceful protests, and everything was legal.

“Except that the demonstrators didn’t have a permit or anything like that, but we were just going to ignore that,” Morris said. “The discussion was, just let them do what they’re doing. ... If you don’t make any arrests, you won’t get any national attention, and this will probably go away soon.”

But that’s not how this story goes. In fact, the exact opposite happened.

In early June, while Morris was stopping traffic, one of the protesters spat in his face, he said.

“That shocked me, because I was trying to protect them,” he said. He tried to arrest her on the spot, but a large group she was with intervened and led her away, he said.

A few moments later, with the help of other officers, he arrested the woman, who was wearing a bright red dress, he remembers.

“That was the first arrest of the summer,” Morris said. “So that kind of broke the agreement.”

This was the same day that protesters marched into City Hall and occupied the city manager’s office, which resulted in more arrests. Morris said the protesters wanted to see the mayor, Julian Stinson, but he was in Richmond that day.

The protesters had filled cigar boxes with soft drink tops, and they were shaking them to make noise, Morris said. “I mean you couldn’t hear anything in that office, they couldn’t do any work,” he said.

After the arrests on June 5, tension rose and the demonstrations became less peaceful, Morris said.

He said protesters began to throw bricks and bottles at police, breaking squad car windows, and even the window of the old Hotel Leeland on Main Street, which caused shattered glass to rain over the officers.

“One of the officers driving up Industrial Avenue, his police car was shot up,” he said. “A bullet came in by his head and lodged in the sun visor.”

But Moore-Batson said she never saw any violence from protesters toward the police. It was always the other way around, she said.

“We were always peaceful,” she said. “[The leaders] had told us that this was a nonviolent movement. And if you can’t be nonviolent, they don’t want you to participate.”

Protesters maintained this directive, even as the city made it more difficult for them to demonstrate, Moore-Batson said.

On June 6, state court [Judge Archibald Aiken](#) issued a temporary injunction that later became permanent, drastically limiting protests. He also began to use an 1859 statute to charge and arrest protesters.

The statute, enacted after John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, charged people with “conspiring to incite the colored population of the State to acts of violence and war against the white population.”

This was enforced by the police department, under [McCain](#), the chief.

The DCPA began to seek help from national organizations, like King's SCLC and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. These organizations sent people to Danville to assist with the movement.

That's how Dorothy Zellner found herself in Danville in the summer of 1963.

Zellner, a white Jewish woman from New York, was a 25-year-old member of the SNCC at the time. She traveled to cities across the South to write pamphlets. Though she was not a field organizer, she would soon find herself in the throes of the conflict.

Danville felt like the Deep South, Zellner said.

Aside from Mississippi and Southwest Georgia, Danville was one of the harshest places that Zellner visited, she said. She wrote about her observations of Danville and the events of the summer of 1963 in [this contemporaneous pamphlet](#) for her organization.

Zellner wrote that "for its size, [Danville] is running a close race with Birmingham for top honors in police brutality."

She stayed away from Virginia for decades afterward, not returning until very recently, she said.

"My overall memory, and I certainly hope things have changed, was that [Danville] was a very nasty place. It was very segregated. It was very rigid," she said. "They acted as if the Black community were their mortal enemies. There was something really fearsome and rigid about this place. ... And this was the Upper South. This wasn't in the heart of Mississippi."

But it certainly felt that way, Zellner said. Especially on a day like Bloody Monday.

The boil-over: Bloody Monday, June 10, 1963

June 10 was the hottest day of the summer of 1963, with a high of 99 degrees in Danville. The daily demonstrations continued despite the heat.

In the evening, a group of protesters held a prayer vigil outside the jail for those who had been arrested earlier in the day.

“At that time, the back of City Hall was the city jail, so there was a sort of alley between the two,” Moore-Batson said. “We were in the alley to sing and pray and tell those who had been arrested, ‘We’re here for you.’”

That’s when the police started using the fire hoses, she said.

“The people were sandwiched in this alley, and they were washing us up against cars, up against buildings,” she said. “I didn’t get beaten that night. I just got bruises and scratches from running down the steps trying to get away.”

Women didn’t wear pants back then, Moore-Batson said. Only skirts and blouses. “Your legs and arms were always scratched up and bruised,” she said.

Zellner was also there. She was knocked down by a fire hose, which washed away her shoes and purse, and then she was struck on the back of the head by a police officer with a nightstick.

“This was gratuitous violence,” Zellner said. “There was a meanness about it, a meanness. This was completely unnecessary.”

And police officers weren’t the only ones wielding nightsticks. The police department had deputized others, like garbage men and municipal workers.

“This was a very, very nasty technique,” Zellner said. “You deputize any white man who is walking and talking. You could deputize a drunk lying on the street, and then that person has almost the power of life and death over people.”

Morris said that police officers are trained how to wield nightsticks. “You don’t hit people in the head,” he said. But the municipal workers were not trained.

“I’m not saying there were no policemen that did things wrong, but I think that’s where most of the injury came from,” he said.

At the end of the conflict, 47 people were injured and 60 were arrested, according to the historical marker in Danville.

Morris was not there on the evening of Bloody Monday, but he said the number of injuries recorded on the marker does not match his memories of that evening.

“Thank goodness I was not there,” Morris said. He was back on the day shift by that point in the summer, he said, and his shift had been relieved early. When he got home, “my wife told me that they had called us back, but I didn’t know why.”

By the time he arrived, the conflict was over, though there was still water running in the streets, he said.

“I don’t know how they defined injury on the plaque that’s downtown,” Morris said. “I know that I was sent to Winslow Hospital, a Black hospital back in those days, and there were only 13 people treated at the hospital. Most of them were minor injuries. There were two people who were kept overnight, complaining of back injuries. I don’t know if that was the firehose, or what caused those injuries. But that’s a far cry from the numbers on the plaque.”

He said he was told that other demonstrators were treated for injuries at churches like High Street Baptist Church and Bibleway Cathedral.

“I don’t know what kind of injuries those were, but I’m just speaking from my own experience and what I saw,” Morris said.

Moore-Batson said she remembers seeing people bleeding from the head, people with broken arms and legs, and one woman who had to be rushed to a hospital in Richmond because “she was beaten so bad, one of her breasts looked like hamburger.”

Most of the injured were tended to at Winslow Hospital because they weren’t allowed at the main hospital.

Mary Barnes, who was about 10 years old at the time, remembers her father helping take the injured to Winslow.

Barnes was in the car with her family, driving on Loyal Street toward their home in the Almagro community in Danville, one of the first planned all-Black communities in the country.

“We saw water hoses watering people, and people running from police or deputized garbage men with billy sticks,” Barnes said. “People were running toward our car, and my dad stopped and told them to get in the car.”

Her father drove the injured to Winslow Hospital, dropped his family off at home, and then returned to pick up more injured people, Barnes said.

“Wherever he saw people falling down or running, he would get them and take them back and forth to the hospital,” she said. “That’s what he told us later on. ... My dad had courage to take people back and forth and still shield his family from most of it.”

The events of Bloody Monday attracted national attention. King condemned the police actions, and McCain, the police chief, came under heavy scrutiny.

Morris, who became police chief himself in 1971, said hindsight is 20/20, but he would’ve handled things differently than McCain.

“If you look at what happened that night, as police chief, I wouldn’t have handled it that way,” he said. “I just think there was a better way to handle it. And I never did anything like that in my 32 years as police chief.”

The aftermath: Mid-summer 1963 to today

Despite the horrific events of June 10, the summer continued, and so did the demonstrations.

Trials began under Aiken on June 17. The judge — after whom a bridge is named in Danville today — excluded the public from courtroom procedures, required all defendants to attend daily roll call and banned any discussion of the constitutionality of the injunction. He was also known to wear a gun to the courthouse, though he said he never wore it in the courtroom.

The U.S. Department of Justice “issued a brief that strongly criticized [Aiken’s] courtroom procedures,” according to [Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

On July 10, the city enacted another ordinance that further cracked down on demonstrations.

The next day, July 11, King came to Danville to speak for the second time that year. During his previous visit, in March, he’d addressed a crowd of about 2,500 at an event organized by the DCPA and held at the City Auditorium.

In July, he spoke at High Street Baptist Church, condemning the actions of the local police.

King said he had “seen some brutal things on the part of policemen all across the South, but very seldom, if ever, have I heard of a police force being as brutal and vicious as the police have been here in Danville, Virginia,” adding that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

King would return twice more to Danville in November that year, for a total of four visits in 1963.

D CPA, SCLC and SNCC efforts continued in Danville, with the organizations sending more representatives, leading campaigns and continuing to organize demonstrations.

“By summer’s end, however, arrests, high bail, restrictive injunctions and ordinances had worn down and frustrated the Danville community,” according to Encyclopedia Virginia.

But as summer turned to fall, some of the protesters’ demands were finally met. In August, the Danville School Board voted to accept a six-year plan to integrate schools.

And on Oct. 16, McCain announced the hiring of the first ever Black police officer in Danville, William T. Terry, which protesters had been calling for.

The city council met another demand on Nov. 12, when it agreed to implement fair employment policies after meeting with Black leaders in town.

Voter registration efforts continued, and activists like Moore-Batson taught other Black residents how to read and write so that they could register to vote.

She said she didn’t realize the impact that this summer would have on Danville decades in the future.

“We never thought, ‘This is making history,’” she said. “We never thought of any of that. We just knew that we had to do this now. We can’t wait any longer, it has to be done now. And I guess that’s how everybody felt throughout the South.”

Zellner hasn't been back to Danville since 1963, she said.

"I lost track of what happened," she said. "I assume that Danville ceased to be segregated some years after that. For all I know, the chief of police is Black now, and maybe the mayor is, too."

Danville does have a Black mayor today, and a majority Black city council, which is something that many residents point to when talking about the strides that the city has made.

"That says a lot about the citizens in the community," said Karice Luck-Brimmer, a local historian and genealogist, who is Black. "The citizens are the ones that put them in office. And there was a time when you could hardly find a white person that would vote for a Black person."

The changes that started in the 1960s helped create the success that Danville has seen today, Morris said. There's been a "tremendous change" in the attitudes of people, he said, and Danvillians are now accepting of each other.

"I think we've learned the lesson that you can't have this bitter division between people and have a successful city, and we have a successful city," he said. "That's because of what started back in '63. And we've been building on that. People saw the mistakes. ... I guess you're always going to make mistakes, but you don't want to make the same one twice."

In 2019, the Danville Police Department made a public apology to the community for the actions of the police on Bloody Monday.

Scott Booth, the current police chief, said that Bloody Monday was a community trauma that inhibited the police from forming a strong relationship with the community for many years.

“I’ve worked in larger cities, and I never could remember one incident really having a hold on a city like Bloody Monday did in Danville,” Booth said.

Moore-Batson said Danville has come a long way, but there’s still more work to be done. She said she feels more comfortable going about her day-to-day life, and enjoys being able to do mundane things like ride elevators and eat at any restaurant she wants.

“God made us all. We’re just different colors, but we’re still people,” she said. “I think we have learned that over these 60 years.”

Danville grapples with the memory of Bloody Monday

For decades, the city did not acknowledge Danville's civil rights movement or the police response to it in a meaningful way. Now residents are working to ensure that Danville's history is remembered by the entire city.

by **Grace Mamon**

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Depending on whom you talk to in Danville, the summer of 1963 is a time that the community has either largely forgotten about or can't let go of.

Both are right.

For decades, the city's civil rights struggles went largely unacknowledged by those who were in power — and, by extension, who were the keepers of Danville's collective memory. Boxes of photos from Bloody Monday, the day when the city's white police force attacked the mostly Black protesters with fire hoses and billy clubs, sat unopened, gathering dust in the historical society's archive.

But over those same decades, the memories lived fresh within Danville's Black community, tainting its relationship with the police department, and with the city.

In more recent years, the city has finally begun to publicly commemorate its civil rights struggle.

Today, 60 years later, Danville has a historical marker for Bloody Monday and a museum exhibit about the movement. There are also tours led by Black historians and members of the historical society, and an anticipated documentary that has finally given a platform to the Black residents who experienced the summer of 1963.

Black communities that have been affected by past traumatic events tend to have a long memory, said Emilye Crosby, a scholar of civil rights and African American history who teaches at SUNY Geneseo in New York.

“Whereas whites in the same community, they don’t really think about these events, sometimes they don’t know about these events, or they weren’t central to their lives in the same way,” Crosby said.

Even if white people are aware of the Black history in their community, they may be less willing to talk about it, she said.

“Many, many, many whites don’t want to talk about the civil rights movement,” Crosby said. “They don’t want to acknowledge it. They don’t want to acknowledge Jim Crow or slavery.”

Crosby’s academic work mainly focuses on Claiborne County, Mississippi, and its county seat of Port Gibson. She’s conducted more than 100 oral history interviews with Black and white people from this community.

“Whites in the community that I talked to for my work, they described it as ‘that old mess,’” Crosby said. “‘Why do you want to talk about that old mess?’ and ‘Why do you bring that up?’ I think that’s a kind of common refrain.”

And among Black people, there are usually two reactions to past community trauma, she said. The first looks similar to the white response that Crosby has encountered — though for very different reasons.

“Some African Americans don’t want to look back at the difficulties; they’d rather look forward. They don’t want to sort of reinforce a difficult past, and they’d like their children to have a brighter future where that’s not so central in their lives.” Crosby said.

But other Black residents want to speak about it, to spread information about this history.

“Of course, there are African Americans who very much want to have people confirm and acknowledge what’s been done in the past,” Crosby said.

Both of these viewpoints exist in Danville’s Black communities, said Karice Luck-Brimmer, a local historian and genealogist.

About 49% of Danville residents today are Black, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 2021. About 43% are white.

Luck-Brimmer, who is Black, has been collecting oral histories and doing genealogy work in Danville for more than 20 years.

“Some people, they just love to talk,” she said. “They’re proud of where they came from and they’ll tell you all about it. But you do have a group where it’s painful for them, or their families didn’t talk about it. They’ll say, ‘Why do you want to dredge up all that stuff? It’s too painful for us, and we don’t want to remember.’”

Dorothy Moore-Batson, who was 18 during the summer of 1963 and participated in the demonstrations daily, has spoken about her experience many times over the years to print and TV reporters.

But she said she thinks most people who were there don’t like to remember it.

“That’s the kind of thing that you don’t want to think about,” Moore-Batson said. “You want to forget about it.”

Mary Barnes, who was about 10 years old in 1963, remembers her father picking up injured protesters in the family car and driving them to the hospital. But she said her family didn’t talk much about it after that.

“There was just never any talk about it,” said Barnes, who is Black. “You just grew up knowing things that happened, and yet your parents wouldn’t talk to you about it because they were trying to spare you, spare your nerves.”

Both Moore-Batson and Barnes left Danville, then moved back later in life to care for ailing parents and ended up staying.

Neal Morris, who was a 24-year-old motorcycle patrolman with the Danville Police Department during the summer of 1963, believes that

Danville's Black residents are more likely than white residents to remember the events of that summer.

Morris, who is white, never moved away.

"The Black community would certainly remember this more because they were the victims, or some of their family members were victims," Morris said. "I'm sure that that has a great impact on them more than anybody else. There's not many people left from a police standpoint."

What Morris does recall is sometimes at odds with the stories that demonstrators have shared, and with the historical record.

Morris remembers riding on his motorcycle, stopping traffic for protesters, during the spring demonstrations.

"As a police officer, you don't particularly pay that much attention to it, you just go about doing your job," he said. "The law was what we had to enforce. I wasn't in any decision-making position or anything like that at the time."

The Danville Police Department deputized municipal workers during the summer of 1963, and Morris said that much of the violence came from these untrained men.

"I'm not saying there were no policemen that did things wrong, but I think that's where most of the injury came from," he said.

He also remembers protesters throwing bottles and bricks at the officers.

But Moore-Batson said the protesters were always nonviolent. Any violence that summer came from the police, she said.

Moore-Batson was arrested later in the summer, while she was leading a peaceful march downtown. City ordinances at the time strictly prohibited demonstration, and the police thought that arresting the leader would break up the march, she said.

Two officers held her by her arms and dragged her to a police car, she said.

Morris and Moore-Batson also have very different memories about the people who were injured on Bloody Monday.

Morris said he visited the Winslow Hospital — the Black hospital in those days — and only saw about 13 people getting treated for minor injuries.

But Moore-Batson recalls more severe injuries. “It was so bad,” she said. “People had bleeding heads, broken arms and legs.”

The historical marker in front of Danville’s courthouse reads: “Police clubbed and fire-hosed the marchers, injuring at least 47 and arresting 60.”

Rediscovering an archive of the city’s past

Despite the “long memory” of some Danville residents, the community as a whole managed to largely sidestep the legacy of Bloody Monday for decades.

Until recently, even the Danville Historical Society had barely acknowledged the city's Black history.

Part of that had to do with the group's early mission: It started in the 1970s in response to urban renewal in the city and primarily worked to save historic homes. For years, it maintained a focus on architecture, and on whatever the head of the organization was personally interested in, said Robin Marcato, its executive director.

During those years, the historical society was largely unorganized, and it had no physical space until 2019, so its massive collection of records and photographs remained boxed up, out of sight.

It was also a volunteer organization until just last year, when Marcato and archivists Cody Foster and Joe Scott were hired as the first paid employees.

But the historical society also was part of a city that had pushed back against civil rights — an uncomfortable fact for some residents to acknowledge.

“There are so many people that I've talked to since I moved here that don't want to talk about particular chapters of Danville history, because they feel they're embarrassing to the town,” Marcato said. “I feel strongly that nothing should be embarrassing about this kind of history. It's something that you acknowledge and you learn from and you understand.”

The historical society itself hasn't been immune. Its former president [resigned in 2020 after racist remarks were posted on his Facebook page](#). The organization called the comments “repugnant.”

Today, the historical society encompasses everything from Native American history in the area to the present. For the first time since its inception in the 1970s, it is working to include a complete and comprehensive history of the city.

“To me, focusing on one specific part of history completely just throws away what DHS represents,” Foster said.

Marcato, Foster and Scott have been working to organize and digitize the historical society's archives, and to make the materials accessible to the public.

This means that people who were involved in Danville's civil rights protests can now go in and see photos, court documents and other materials from that summer — some for the first time ever.

Marcato said the family of the late Bishop Lawrence Campbell, a major leader in the local civil rights movement, came in to look at photos from the summer of 1963. They had no idea that the historical society had so many, she said.

Moore-Batson said she was unaware of the historical society's collection, too.

“In its previous iteration, it wasn't accessible to anyone except those who knew where the right box was,” Marcato said. “This stuff doesn't belong to us. It's here for the community.”

Another example of delayed recognition is the Bloody Monday historical marker that stands outside the courthouse on Patton Street. It wasn't erected until 2007, 44 years after the fact.

But Luck-Brimmer said it's significant that Danville even has the marker because very few historic markers feature Black history.

Only about 6% of the nation's more than 179,000 historical markers are tagged in the "African American" category in the Historical Marker Database. And only 2% are tagged in the "Civil Rights" category.

"[A historical marker] is one of the highest honors as far as remembrance, whether it's for a city, a place, a site, an event," Luck-Brimmer said. "And ours is right there where [Bloody Monday] happened. So the city did a great job getting that."

Letting the people tell their own stories

In addition to erecting the marker and revamping the historical society, the city also has an exhibit on the summer of 1963 in the Danville Fine Arts and History Museum.

The museum used to be the Danville Memorial Library, which was the site of a sit-in in 1960.

The exhibit, installed in 2019, was developed by one of Luck-Brimmer's colleagues, the late Emma Edmunds. Edmunds was working with Luck-Brimmer to share more civil rights stories with the community when she died in 2020 at age 74.

Luck-Brimmer said she was focused just on oral histories until she met Edmunds, who was from Halifax County.

“The people that she had researched, I actually knew a lot of them personally through my own work,” Luck-Brimmer said. “I didn’t have an interest in Danville civil rights, I was just collecting oral histories and [civil rights] was part of those stories. It wasn’t until I met Emma that I realized, we really do need to put this stuff out.”

Edmunds made people in Danville care about the city’s civil rights movement, Luck-Brimmer said.

“She was just a real influential lady,” she said. “It was a sight to see, this old white lady walking through the community talking about civil rights. Telling people, ‘You need to talk about this stuff.’ And the people started to listen.”

Edmunds and Luck-Brimmer prioritized letting the participants of Danville’s civil rights movement tell their own stories, because some of them are still alive and in Danville, Luck-Brimmer said.

“They should be the ones telling these stories and making it known,” she said. “A lot of these things, we look at them like they happened so long ago, but we’re only talking 60 years.”

Luck-Brimmer has also been working with producer Jonathan Parker, who is making a documentary about the summer of 1963 in Danville. He plans to share the documentary with the community sometime this summer.

Parker, who grew up in the Danville area, said Luck-Brimmer has been a crucial part in making the documentary come together. She introduced his team to people who were involved in the civil rights movement, he said.

“At the end of the day, I’m a white person working on a project about the stories of the Black community,” Parker said. “[Luck-Brimmer] was instrumental in providing that connection to the community and helping us build trust.”

But first he had to win her trust, which took some effort, he said.

“I’m just protective over some of the people and their stories,” Luck-Brimmer said. “I was skeptical because I just believe that the people who lived through these experiences, they should be the ones telling their own stories.”

Parker said the documentary will do this as it’s “journalistic” and spotlights the individuals who were involved in the protests and their memories of that time, he said.

It’s easy to be skeptical of projects like this, Luck-Brimmer said, because for so long, the story wasn’t told – and was neglected by entities like historical societies that can “choose what to protect and preserve.”

And when the story is told, it’s often done in a way that makes it seem like everything is fixed now, she said.

“You have a history of your story being told that way,” Luck-Brimmer said. “That’s a part of the skepticism. There’s been a huge initiative in

the past couple of years even, just to make sure that the stories are being told by the people who lived it and who connect with it.”

Luck-Brimmer also leads tours around Danville, highlighting the city’s civil rights history and Black history – which overlap, but are not synonymous, she said.

“There’s more to Danville’s African American history than the local civil rights movement,” she said. “There’s so many other stories.”

Reaching the next generation

It’s important to start talking about this history more, said Foster, to ensure that it survives as the generation that lived it ages.

Parker said he felt like he was “literally racing against the clock” while making his documentary. Three of the people he interviewed, or wanted to interview, died before it was complete, including Campbell, whom Parker interviewed in the fall. He died in March at age 93.

The Danville Historical Society tries to share the city’s civil rights history with the younger generation by giving tours, sometimes exclusively to students. Foster said he and Scott recently gave a tour to a group of local high school students, many of whom were Black.

“They had little to no knowledge of the history of High Street Baptist or the freedom movement or even Bloody Monday,” Foster said.

“Some of them were just really taken aback by the brutality of the situation ... they might’ve heard it mentioned by a grandparent or something, but I don’t think they had really ever faced just how dire the situation was at the time.”

Zydasia Smith, a Danville native who was a teenager when she organized local demonstrations in June of 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd, never learned about Bloody Monday in school, according to [a Washington Post article](#) on the city's relationship with its Confederate and Black histories.

Crosby said this is somewhat common. "More and more, African American children don't know about their history," she said.

Marcato said students are surprised to learn that many of the people involved in the 1963 protests were themselves teenagers and students.

Foster said he gets excited when high schoolers become interested in this chapter of the city's history.

"Hopefully, with their being some interest in these stories, those students will go back and ask their grandparents about it and get information firsthand," Foster said. "That way these firsthand accounts can live on."

First acknowledgement, then a path forward

Efforts like the museum exhibit, the documentary and the civil rights tours can help educate the community about Bloody Monday and the summer of 1963, Luck-Brimmer said.

Acknowledgement of events like these is crucial for a community, Crosby said, because progress can actually be hindered when a community trauma is not recognized.

“Whites should talk about this stuff as much as African Americans,” she said. “[Education] is an important piece of what communities can do, so that it’s not just a Black issue or something that African Americans care about or know about, but something that the entire community knows.”

Crosby mentioned the National Memorial for Peace and Justice — informally known as the National Lynching Memorial — in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Equal Justice Initiative, the organization behind the memorial, is working to document the lynchings that occurred throughout the country. “Until now, there has been no national memorial acknowledging the victims of racial terror lynchings,” its website says.

The memorial sits on a 6-acre site on top of a hill overlooking Montgomery. There are more than 800 steel columns in the center of the site, one for each county in the U.S. where a lynching took place, with the names of the victims engraved on the columns.

The organization’s efforts also include educating communities where lynchings occurred and erecting historical markers.

“Until there’s some acknowledgement of events like that, it can be hard to move forward in any way in that community,” Crosby said.

This was certainly the case in Danville, said Police Chief Scott Booth. He arrived in 2018, 55 years after Bloody Monday, and he said he found that it [still had a hold on the community](#).

Booth said that the police action during the summer of 1963 was “a real deterrent” in creating a trusting relationship between the community and the police in the intervening decades.

In 2019, the police department made [a public apology to the community](#) for the actions of the force during the summer of 1963.

After the apology, Booth and civil rights leader Campbell had a public discussion about race relations in the city.

Acknowledging historical division between the community and the police, especially if it stems from police violence against community members during a civil rights struggle, is absolutely critical in rebuilding this relationship, said David Kennedy, professor of criminal justice at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.

“[If] nobody’s ever acknowledged it or done anything about it, then sending police officers to talk to kids in schools or having community meetings or having barbecues or having basketball leagues or something like that, not only is that shallow perspective, it’s insulting,” Kennedy said. “Because it is the authority saying to the community, ‘We’re going to pretend that this never happened and we expect you to like us and work with us anyway.’”

Danville city leaders and community members are working on acknowledgement efforts, and Luck-Brimmer said they’ve done a great job so far.

She said the city is known for its role in the Civil War, housing Jefferson Davis and becoming a temporary capital of the Confederacy after Richmond fell.

But Danville's history is more than that, she said.

“We need to all put forth the effort to make sure we're informing this community of a more inclusive narrative to make sure all of the stories are heard,” she said. “This is a part of our history, and we're proud of it. We're proud of our legacies, we're proud of our culture, and we're most proud of how we have been able to sustain as a people with all of the things that have happened historically.”

The people who remember Danville's civil rights movement

Many of the people who participated in Danville's civil rights struggle 60 years ago are still alive today. These are five profiles of the people helping Danville remember its history.

by **Grace Mamon**
Cardinal News
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Many people who participated in Danville's civil rights movement still live in the city. Some moved away and returned, years later. Others left and never came back. Still, many current Danville residents have firsthand accounts from the summer of 1963. And many more grew up hearing stories from their grandparents, older neighbors and other members of the community. Here are some of those stories.

Karice Luck-Brimmer

Karice Luck-Brimmer grew up listening to her grandfather's stories about Danville.

"I was just a nosy teen," she said. "But my grandfather was like the community historian, and the stuff he would talk to me about, I would sit and wonder about it, and I was very drawn to it."

She didn't know what a genealogist was, but she fell in love with stories about the history of Danville, where she was born and raised.

She remembers the first time she heard about the civil rights movement in Danville, when she was 7 or 8 years old.

Her grandfather told her the story of his experience on Bloody Monday — June 10, 1963. It included Cousin Boosie, the nickname for a family member whom Luck-Brimmer had grown up hearing stories about.

“My grandfather said that on Bloody Monday, he packed up his wife, my grandmother, and a car full of other women,” she said. “They were fired up and ready to go, and he drove them across the Worsham Street Bridge and he parked right where Link’s Cafe is today.”

The women might have been fired up and ready, but Luck-Brimmer’s grandfather was not, she said.

“He told the women, ‘I’m not going around the corner to get my tail beat. I’m going to stay right here with the getaway car,’” she said. “He said he remembers the craziest scene, shortly after. He sees the women coming back around the corner where Link’s is, and the police are behind them wielding billy clubs.”

Everybody made it to the car — except Cousin Boosie.

“He remembers looking in the rearview mirror and driving across the bridge and seeing Cousin Boosie being beat by the police,” Luck-Brimmer said.

The story made her curious about Cousin Boosie. Who was she, really? Luck-Brimmer asked around and eventually discovered that Boosie’s real name was Celeste Lindsey.

Luck-Brimmer found Lindsey's arrest report, and although she wasn't able to discover much more about her, it sparked an interest in genealogy and community history.

She began going to the library with her mother — but not for children's books.

Luck-Brimmer said she would always read biographies. She remembers checking out the biography of Mahalia Jackson, an American gospel singer of the 20th century, to the surprise of the librarians.

“They were like, ‘Why do you care about that?’” Luck-Brimmer said. “But I just loved this stuff.”

Now in her mid-40s, she's a genealogist and historian and works with Virginia Humanities, which is based at the University of Virginia and aims to help people connect with their history and culture.

“I have clients all over the country that I do genealogy for,” Luck-Brimmer said. “But my day job, it actually overlaps with a lot of the work that I do with the community. It actually gives me more resources, especially to do the work around storytelling.”

She's collected oral histories from Danvillians for years. Her work wasn't specifically focused on the civil rights movement, though, until she met Emma Edmunds through Virginia Humanities.

Edmunds, a journalist, was a Halifax County native but had never heard of Danville's civil rights movement until she was doing research

for a story about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Luck-Brimmer said.

“She said all she kept seeing was Danville, Danville, Danville,” Luck-Brimmer said. “And she said, ‘Wait a minute, what does Danville have to do with the civil rights movement?’”

Edmunds realized that there was a rich history in her home region, Luck-Brimmer said, and she was inspired to learn more about Danville’s movement.

She put together a museum exhibit that includes profiles of the people involved in the movement, as well as timelines and photographs. In 2019, the exhibit was installed at the Danville Fine Arts and History Museum, which was formerly the Danville Memorial Library, the location of one of the first sit-ins of 1963.

Edmunds continued to share stories about the civil rights movement until her death in 2020 at age 74, Luck-Brimmer said.

“Emma talked about Danville civil rights, I’m going to say it was in her daily conversation, up until she died,” Luck-Brimmer said.

Edmunds had been working with Luck-Brimmer on a follow-up to her first museum exhibit; now Luck-Brimmer is continuing that project without her.

She wants to share more stories about the movement, she said, and is working with producer Jonathan Parker on a documentary about Bloody Monday in Danville.

Luck-Brimmer was instrumental in making the documentary come together, Parker said. She knew many residents who had been part of the civil rights movement, and she helped Parker and his team, who are white, establish trust with the city's Black community.

This was critical, Parker said, because many people are hesitant to share their stories in the first place. And they're even more reluctant if they think the storyteller won't do their stories justice, which has happened in the past, Luck-Brimmer said.

Once Parker won her trust and approval — and the approval of Bishop Lawrence Campbell, who was one of the leaders of Danville's movement — Luck-Brimmer helped him get in touch with community members.

She said the documentary puts the focus on the people who were actually involved and was a great way for them to share their experiences in their own words. Parker plans to hold a community viewing of the documentary sometime this summer.

Luck-Brimmer said she sometimes runs into obstacles in her job, especially when she's tracking down documents for her genealogy work.

“It's almost like it's by design to keep us from knowing some of this history,” she said. “One of the biggest barriers has been records, because Black people were enslaved and they didn't appear by name until the 1870 census.”

Marriage records and other documents either don't exist or weren't deemed important enough to preserve, Luck-Brimmer said, which is where oral histories come in.

But even then, she said, not everyone is willing to talk about the past, especially if it's painful.

Some of the Bloody Monday protesters are reluctant to share their stories because they "don't want to remember," Luck-Brimmer said.

"Being a genealogist, you have to be a little detective piecing things together and developing all types of tips and techniques and clues to help us get to this information," she said. "For the most part, if it's out there, I can find it."

Mary Barnes

The Almagro community in Danville where Mary Barnes grew up was a self-sufficient, all-Black neighborhood — one of very few in the country — that dates back to the 1880s.

Barnes was about 10 years old in 1963, when segregation was legal and Danville's civil rights movement was in full swing. It was a scary time to be a child, she said.

"There was always this undercurrent of fear going on in your life," Barnes said. "You grew up that way. You knew how to walk down the sidewalk and avoid certain people."

Though Barnes was young, memories of Bloody Monday and the rest of the summer have stuck with her.

She remembers riding in the family car with her brother and parents on June 10, 1963.

“We were in the car, and saw this crowd of people running and police after them,” Barnes said. “We saw water hoses watering people, and people running from police or deputized garbagemen with billy sticks.”

People were running toward their car, she said, and her father stopped and told them to get in.

“We drove those people to the hospital,” Barnes said. “My dad drove the family home and then he drove back to the area, and wherever he saw people falling down or running, he would get them and take them back and forth to the hospital.”

After that, her family didn’t ever talk about it, she said.

But just a few years later, Barnes was in the middle of another civil rights effort: At age 12, she was part of a group of Black students who integrated Robert E. Lee Junior High School.

Life was uncomfortable, she said, which made safe places like church even more valuable.

“The church meant more to you than anything else because that was one of the places where you could go, and even though you didn’t talk

about it, you could release some of that anger and fear and everything else by praising God and being emotional that way,” Barnes said.

Barnes’ grandfather was a pastor, and she has been a member of Bibleway Cathedral since 1993.

That’s when she finally returned to Danville after leaving as a young adult, in 1972.

“At 19 years old, I got married and got the hell out of Danville,” Barnes said.

She and her husband moved about an hour south to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She needed to leave because she held anger and resentment toward the city after her childhood experiences, she said.

But when her mother got sick 21 years later, Barnes returned to Danville to care for her. She didn’t expect much out of her hometown, she said.

“But after being here and becoming part of the community again, I saw the things that had changed,” she said. “I can say it’s a very, very different city. Some of the remnants are still visible, still here, but it’s a much better city.”

But she’s still glad she didn’t raise her twin sons in Danville.

“There was so much anger still in me,” she said. “That was one of the reasons I had to come back. I had personal reasons, too, but I also needed to deal with those demons inside of me.”

She opened an antique store, Miss Bunnie's Variety Store, on Jefferson Street. She used the space not only to sell antiques, but also to [make a positive impact on the community](#) by doing things like helping local students with their homework.

She sold the buildings in 2022 and donated her antique collection to the Danville Historical Society.

Barnes, who's 70, said she likes living in Danville now, and she hopes that the contributions that her family made there will be remembered as important.

"Thank God things have changed so much," Barnes said. "In the city, and in me."

Neal Morris

Neal Morris grew up in Pittsylvania County and joined the Danville police force when he was around 21 years old.

Three years later, on May 31, 1963, he witnessed the first demonstration of the summer.

"We had three shifts back in those days, and I was working the evening shift from 3:30 until 11:30," Morris said. "I was on a motorcycle and there was a group of people on the City Hall steps singing."

He first thought it was a church group because they were singing hymns like "We Shall Not be Moved."

Normally, the police department would've been informed about any gathering on city property, but this one was unexpected, Morris said.

"That's when we found out that there was a movement beginning," he said. "We didn't know how long it would last. We didn't know it wasn't a one-day event. But it turned out to be practically every day through the entire summer."

Morris said he did his job that summer, following orders from Chief Eugene McCain. He arrested demonstrators for violating the city ordinances that limited protests.

"The law was what we had to enforce," he said. "I wasn't in any decision-making position or anything like that at the time."

There were hundreds of arrests throughout the summer, followed by trials.

"They filled up the city jail and then they started to move people [to jails] some distance away from Danville," Morris said. "That probably had an adverse effect on the protests, because of the amount of people that had been arrested."

That went on for the entire summer, until school started, he said. A lot of the protesters were young, and many were students.

Morris said he could understand where the demonstrators were coming from.

“If I couldn’t go to a theater, if I couldn’t eat in a restaurant, if I couldn’t stay in a hotel, I’d have been demonstrating too,” he said. “I understood what they were doing. They were looking for equal rights.”

Morris remembers the inequality that was rampant in Danville in those days, before desegregation.

“I remember they used to have drinking fountains that said ‘white’ and ‘colored,’ things like that, which would’ve been demeaning to an individual,” he said. “I mean, what’s the difference?”

He also remembers particular protesters, like the late Bishop Lawrence Campbell, who died this March at the age of 94.

“Bishop Campbell, he was a very calm, very steady individual,” Morris said. “He had a goal that he wanted to accomplish, and he was not involved in anything that was destructive or anything like that. He was a constructive figure in all of this.”

Morris, now in his mid-80s, believes that Danville’s success today can be attributed to the changes that came about in 1963.

“You can’t have this bitter division between people and have a successful city, and we have a successful city,” he said. “That’s because of what started back in ’63.”

Morris, who became police chief himself in 1971, said that if he had been chief during the summer of 1963, he wouldn’t have handled things so aggressively. “I never did anything like that in my 32 years as police chief,” he said.

His first priority as chief was to hire Black officers, he said; he worked with a group of Black ministers to recruit them, he said.

In his first year as chief, Morris also hired the city's first two female officers. One of them, Mildred Corbett, was also the first Black female police officer in the city. She died in 2018 at the age of 77.

“Most departments hired female police officers and put them in juvenile work and not on the street,” he said. “I told them, I hire police officers, and you have to do the same thing that everybody else does. I’m not going to discriminate. And that worked out fine, we had a lot of police females over the years.”

Morris believes that diversifying the police force helped the department's relationship with the community. He also maintained a good relationship with the president of the local NAACP chapter, he said.

Morris retired from police work in 2003, and today, he's the head of Danville's Industrial Development Authority. He also works as an assistant to his wife, Madeline Morris, who is a Realtor with Wilkins & Co. Realtors in Danville.

Morris said he's seen the positive changes in Danville throughout the decades.

“You see what's going on with the casino, the White Mill, industry coming in, jobs being created,” he said. “All because we have a positive attitude, a positive outlook on the future. And I think that is because of what started back in '63.”

Dorothy Moore-Batson

Dorothy Moore-Batson was 18 and had just graduated from high school in the spring of 1963.

She grew up in segregated Danville; she remembers using freight elevators instead of those meant for people, and having to eat at certain restaurants and use certain restrooms. She couldn't go to the park with her friends, she said.

“When we shopped in the stores, me and my mom, my dad, my sister would want to pay for our items,” Moore-Batson said. “But if there was a white person standing nearby, [the cashier] would reach over me and my family to take care of them. They had to be first in every situation.”

It was difficult for Black people to vote, Moore-Batson said; this was before the 1965 Voting Rights Act prohibited literacy tests and other methods used to exclude African Americans from the polls.

“My mom and dad, they voted in every election, but you had to pay a poll tax and you also had to know how to read and write,” Moore-Batson said. “Many people didn't bother to vote because they didn't feel it was going to help anyway. So why would they waste money on a poll tax?”

Her parents took her and her sister with them every time they voted, which was exciting, she said. “Generally speaking, my parents were treated OK when they went to the polls,” Moore-Batson said.

Despite the segregation and unfair treatment, Moore-Batson said she wasn't an angry or sad child.

“You just knew this is how life is,” she said. “You just accepted it.”

But that doesn't mean it wasn't tiresome. The Black community was sick of being treated this way, she said. And when the civil rights movement came, Moore-Batson, her sister and her cousin decided to participate.

They were at the demonstrations every day that summer, she said. Including on Bloody Monday.

Moore-Batson was on the front City Hall steps that evening, she said, not around back where protesters were “sandwiched in the alley” trying to avoid the fire hoses and nightsticks.

“I didn't get beaten that night,” she said. “I just got bruises and scratches from running down the steps trying to get away.”

Another day that summer, though, Moore-Batson was injured by the police. She was leading a march in July when she was arrested under a city ordinance that prohibited protesting.

It was a peaceful demonstration, she said, but the ordinance didn't allow any sort of protests at all. And because she was the leader, police thought that her arrest would break up the march, she said.

“But it didn't, because if you're the leader and that happens to you, there's somebody else to take over the march,” she said.

Policemen grabbed her by the arms and dragged her to a police car, which scraped and bruised her legs. Then they threw her inside and

took her to jail, where she found herself in a cell with other demonstrators, she said.

“I was in jail for probably a week, or a little over a week,” Moore-Batson said. “The jail cells were meant to hold maybe two people and no more than four. But there were about 10 in my cell.”

They used to take turns lying down.

“We had a sink and of course a toilet, but no privacy,” she said. “The food was very good. And we were not allowed to work. The prisoners who were there felt that we should be working, but we didn’t have to. So we used to just sing, pray, read the Bible and talk.”

The charges were eventually dropped, and Moore-Batson was released. But as she was walking out of the jail, she saw her mother, who had also been arrested for participating in the protests, walking in.

“When we passed each other I said, ‘Oh, Mama,’” Moore-Batson said. “She had a little change purse and I said, ‘You can’t have any money in here, Mama.’”

Moore-Batson became part of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and attended the March on Washington that August. She also began working with the voter rights effort in Danville, teaching people how to read and write so that they could register to vote.

Her students, especially older folks, were excited to learn, she said. They were also excited by the prospect of voting.

“That was done at Loyal Baptist Church, and I thought it was so nice that they gave me a key, so I could go in there anytime I wanted and do the classes,” she said. “Someone later on thanked me for teaching their mom how to read and write and said she was so excited about that before she left this planet. That made me feel so good.”

Later, Moore-Batson moved to New York, where she met and married her husband, Freddie. She returned to Danville around 2009, when her mother got sick.

She and Freddie used to divide their time between Danville and New York but have now moved back to her hometown full time.

“My husband decided it’s so nice and quiet here,” she said. “He’s a New Yorker, but he liked it here.”

Moore-Batson, now 78, said she has noticed changes in Danville since moving back.

“We have Blacks on the city council now, which was never done before,” she said. “We have Blacks who work for the city, we’ve had several Black mayors and Blacks on the police force and in the sanitation department. We could never do that back then.”

She’s able to go about her life more comfortably now, she said.

“You don’t have to mind your Ps and Qs so much anymore, you can feel more comfortable,” she said. “I’m able to go to the regular elevators now. ... There’s still a lot that we need to do, but we’ve come a long way.”

Despite the horrors that protesters faced in Danville, Moore-Batson called it “an amazing time.” She met so many people who were spreading so much love, she said.

“Even in my jail cell, we were able to sit and talk and laugh and sing and pray and read the Bible together,” she said. “I can’t recall anyone not being able to get along with each other. And that was just so unusual because you came in contact with so many different people from different parts of the country.”

The intervening six decades have given Moore-Batson time to reflect on the movement.

“We have to remember that people don’t like change, and many times, I would try to imagine myself in a white person’s shoes. If there was something I could do about change, I would try to do it,” she said.

But on the other hand, God made us all, Moore-Batson said. “We’re just different colors, but we’re still people.”

Dorothy Zellner

When sit-ins started in the South in 1960, Dorothy Zellner was 22 years old and a recent graduate of Queens College in her hometown of New York.

Zellner’s parents, left-wing, non-Zionist Jewish immigrants, raised her with not only an awareness of Jewish resistance to Nazism, but also of Black history and racial justice.

She credits her upbringing for her desire to join the civil rights movement, which she did with her parents' support.

She joined organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality and the Southern Regional Council and helped plan the first sit-in in New Orleans.

But her main goal was to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a group run entirely by young people, mostly Black college students. Zellner eventually landed a position as a typist, making her one of very few white members of the organization.

She became friends with James Forman, the group's executive secretary.

“Jim Forman was a complete maniac about history and writing everything down, so he sent me to Danville to write a pamphlet,” Zellner said. “At some point in the spring, after things got really bad in Danville, the leadership of their protest organization called SNCC and asked for help.”

And though she was not a field organizer, she ended up becoming involved in some of the demonstrations.

[Zellner's pamphlet](#) was simply titled “Danville, Virginia.” It includes quotes from another pamphlet put out that April by the Danville Chamber of Commerce.

“I wrote this pamphlet sort of in contradistinction to all the claims that the chamber of commerce was making,” Zellner said. “Even from that pamphlet, you could see how incredibly racist [Danville] was.”

The chamber of commerce pamphlet highlighted features of the city including its segregated library system and mostly “American-born” workforce.

Zellner quoted from the chamber’s piece in her own pamphlet: “Danville, Virginia, invites you to make our city your city — a fine place to live and work.”

And then in response, she wrote: “A young Negro woman who will bear the scars of a police billy stick on her face for the rest of her life — she questions Danville as ‘a fine place to live and work.’ A young Negro man who was beaten so savagely by police that he almost lost an eye and was refused medical attention in jail for three days — he has questions also.”

Zellner’s pamphlet also calls into question the chamber’s claims that Danville, as a “city of churches” with more than 100 congregations of various denominations, has a “high moral and spiritual tone.”

“I couldn’t let that go when I wrote this,” Zellner said. “Believe me, there was no kind of high spiritual tone whatsoever.”

Especially because much of the cruelty was directed at the Black ministers leading the movement and their places of worship, she said.

Her pamphlet also included a list of demonstrators who were hospitalized on Bloody Monday and a description of their injuries. Under the list, Zellner wrote, “An unknown number of persons were treated as outpatients by the staff of Winslow Hospital and discharged without a record being made of their injuries or injury.”

And the pamphlet features photographs of the injured, as well as of the demonstrations, taken by Danny Lyon, an SNCC photographer and Zellner's friend.

Zellner herself was injured by police on Bloody Monday.

"I remember being afraid on the steps of the City Hall," she said. "That's the closest I ever came to knowing that something terrible was going to happen."

She was blasted with a fire hose, which washed away her shoes and purse and knocked her to the ground, where she was hit on the back of her head by a policeman with a nightstick.

"At the time that I was attacked, I weighed 106 pounds. I was absolutely tiny," Zellner said. "I was obviously unarmed. And I was getting up after being knocked down by the water hoses, and that's when this cop hit me over the head. This was gratuitous violence. ... This was completely unnecessary."

She said her injury was minor compared to what others suffered. And she said she remembers being shocked that so many of the demonstrators were injured and hospitalized.

"What kind of a place was this?" Zellner said. "That's what I would say 60 years on, that's what I would ask some of those people who are still alive. I'm 85 years old, there are other people who are 85 who were there. I want to ask them what kind of place they were living in. What did they think?"

Zellner, who traveled around the South with SNCC, said that Danville felt harsher than other Southern cities.

“This was ’63, this was already three years after the sit-ins started, after all,” Zellner said. “You would hardly expect them to go into hysteria the way they did.”

Except for Mississippi and Southwest Georgia, which she said felt like stepping back into 1850, Danville was one of the most brutal cities she visited.

And unlike other Southern cities, there wasn’t really a white liberal presence helping with the movement in Danville, she said.

“In Atlanta and other cities, especially where there were universities, there was usually a very small and beleaguered number of white people who would at least say something,” Zellner said. “I don’t believe that [in Danville] there was one. Well, I’m sure there was, but they were obviously terrified and didn’t say anything. That’s the other thing I remember thinking: Where are the decent people?”

Zellner, like many other protesters, was charged under an 1859 statute enacted after John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry. It charged protesters with “conspiring to incite the colored population of the State to acts of violence and war against the white population.”

Zellner and Lyon, the SNCC photographer, ended up fleeing Danville before they could be arrested.

“Forman told Danny and me that defending us against felony charges, if we were indicted, would be a needless expense,” Zellner writes in

“Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC,” a 2012 book with accounts from 52 women who were involved with the civil rights movement.

Lyon and Zellner took their luggage to a Black church, she recounts in the book. When it was time to go, they climbed out of a back window of the church and into a car, where they lay on the floor of the back seat covered in newspapers.

In August 1963, she married Robert Zellner, another white SNCC activist who was in Danville that summer. They’d both been indicted in Danville and never spent much time in Virginia after that, she said.

“For many years, we never stopped for gas or anything in Virginia,” she said. “If we were driving through Virginia, we kept going because I didn’t show up for any arraignment or anything.”

Zellner continued to work with SNCC until it became a Black-only organization in 1967.

She moved back to New York from New Orleans in 1983. She remains an activist, involved now in feminist causes and the Palestinian solidarity movement.

She said she’s proud to have been one of the hundreds of thousands of participants in the civil rights movement. But there’s still work to be done.

“If you ask me why we’re fighting voter suppression now, 60 years later, that’s very upsetting and depressing,” she said. “It just goes to

show you that the forces that are aligned against human rights are very strong.”

Zellner has not been back to Danville since 1963.

“I assume that it’s a far different place than it was 60 years ago,” she said. “But even 60 years ago, there was really no excuse for that.”

‘We’re trying to let those voices be heard’: Recordings bring Danville’s civil rights court cases to life

Danville’s 1963 civil rights movement led to almost a decade of court cases, most of which were kept closed to the public by a segregationist judge. The Danville courthouse and the Library of Virginia in Richmond both have records and audio recordings.

by **Grace Mamon**
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Image of 1963 protests courtesy of the Danville Historical Society. Text from the 1963 testimony of Arthur Pinchback, one of the leaders of the movement, who was denied service at a Howard Johnson's restaurant, courtesy of the Library of Virginia. Photo illustration by Brooke Stephenson.

Through the scratches and blips of the 57-year-old audio comes the strong, even voice of the Rev. L.W. Chase, explaining to the judge and jury why protests for equal rights have been so important in Danville.

“The proposal of going around the conference table and sitting down and adjusting legitimate grievances doesn’t seem to work,” says Chase, standing trial in 1966 on charges that he violated an injunction

prohibiting civil rights demonstrations. “The struggle will not cease until we attain our full citizenship, and so that’s why we are in this court today.”

Another audio file preserves the voice of Eugene McCain, Danville’s police chief at the time, testifying about law enforcement’s response to the demonstrations on June 10, 1963, which became known as Bloody Monday.

“We turned the fire hose on them [the protesters], and they ran down the alley,” McCain says during another 1966 trial. “I told the police officers to arrest more of them, and they went out and got a group of them out of that bunch and put them in jail. And then another fire truck hooked up a hose on the Patton Street side ... and turned the hose on them at that time from that direction.”

These recordings are part of a collection of records from Danville’s civil rights movement, which resulted in hundreds of trials that lasted about a decade.

The judge, a staunch segregationist, excluded almost the entire public from the court proceedings.

But today, anyone can visit the Danville courthouse or the Library of Virginia in Richmond and read court documents or listen to audio of these proceedings.

Hearing the voices of the protesters and the lawyers “makes you feel like you’re there,” said Gerald Gibson, the clerk of circuit court in Danville. “It’s as if you’re sitting in the courtroom at that time.”

Gibson, who has listened to all 85 hours of trial audio, said the collection was discovered in a storage area in the 1990s. He believed that the material should be better organized and accessible to the public, he said, so he contacted the Library of Virginia to help preserve the collection.

“One of the reasons for doing this was so that anybody interested could come in and actually see and listen,” Gibson said.

Civil rights protesters themselves say they don’t remember all the details from these trials — partly because they happened many decades ago, and partly because the court proceedings don’t stand out as vividly in their memories as the actual protests.

Carolyn Wilson, who still lives in Danville, called the trials “anticlimactic” compared to the excitement of the demonstrations.

Dorothy Moore-Batson, who went to court twice for her involvement in the movement, agreed. But she does have memories of Judge Archibald Aiken and the Black attorneys who represented her.

Some protesters, and some of their children, have visited the courthouse to listen to the trial audio, said Gibson.

Here’s the story of the trials that followed Danville’s civil rights movements and the effort to preserve the court records.

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“Ain’t nobody told me nothing about an injunction at all. ... I didn’t learn about the injunction until I was in jail.”

— *Demonstrator Stuart Walter Mayo's 1966 testimony about his 1963 arrest*

The Danville civil rights protests began on May 31, 1963. By mid-July, more than 250 people — almost all of them Black — had been arrested on charges including contempt, trespassing, disorderly conduct, assault, parading without a permit and resisting arrest.

Most of these charges came under the umbrella of violating a city injunction that limited protests and public assemblies. On June 6, Aiken issued this temporary injunction, which later became permanent.

The city began to use a Civil War-era statute to charge and arrest protesters.

This 1859 statute had its origins in slavery and made it a felony to conspire or to incite “the colored population of the State to acts of violence and war against the white population,” according to [Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

Many of the demonstrators were teenagers, which meant that parents were sometimes held responsible for their kids' involvement in the demonstrations.

“Parents were arrested when they went to the jail to post bail for their children for contributing to the delinquency of a minor by not providing adequate supervision,” according to a [Library of Virginia guide](#) to the collection, written by former archivist Jay Gaidmore.

The trials began June 17. Almost immediately, the defense teams sought intervention from federal courts, on the grounds that a fair trial could not be had under Aiken in Danville.

“It’s not surprising that the protesters and their lawyers looked to the federal courts to vindicate their rights when the Virginia state courts sort of broke down,” said Thomas Frampton, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law who specializes in the intersections of criminal law and race inequalities.

But the federal courts did not provide any relief. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals declared Aiken’s injunction constitutional and cases were remanded to the local court.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision by a 5-4 margin.

“It’s disheartening to see how the federal courts effectively allowed these reactionary state government figures to get away with really outrageous and blatantly unconstitutional things,” Frampton said.

By August 1963, hundreds of people were awaiting trial and bail bonds totaled an estimated \$300,000 — over \$3 million in today’s money.

There were so many individual cases to be tried that the courts dockets were “filled to such an extent that cases separate from the demonstrations could not be heard,” Gaidmore wrote.

The team of defense attorneys agreed to consolidate cases, so instead of having a separate trial for each individual, defendants were tried together without a jury.

This expedited the process and also helped avoid venue changes that would have scattered the trials across other Virginia localities to alleviate the volume of cases in Danville.

Aiken was known to hand down harsh sentences, according to [Encyclopedia Virginia](#). But he did not find every defendant guilty, dismissing some cases for inadequate evidence, according to the Library of Virginia.

A typical sentence was eight days in jail and a fine of \$20, or around \$200 in today's dollars.

“The demonstration leaders received the stiffest penalties with Rev. Lawrence G. Campbell receiving the worst, being sentenced 250 days in jail and a \$2,500 fine,” Gaidmore wrote. This amount would be more than \$20,000 today.

By 1967, appeals from these cases had made their way to the Virginia Supreme Court. In 1973, the Virginia Court of Appeals heard the last of the cases from the demonstrations.

“The Court overturned the convictions of almost 270 people,” Gaidmore wrote. However, it “upheld the convictions of those named in the injunction,” who were the leaders of the movement: Campbell, Julius Adams, the Rev. L.W. Chase, the Rev. A.I. Dunlap and Arthur Pinchback.

On Feb. 9, 1973, the court proceedings finally came to an end, almost 10 years after the day of the first demonstration.

Aiken had died in 1971 of a heart attack. Judge Glynn Phillips Jr., who was by now handling the cases, suspended jail sentences for the movement leaders whose convictions had been upheld by the state Supreme Court, on the condition of good behavior for two years. Phillips also ordered fines that totaled more than \$5,000, or about \$34,000 today.

It's staggering how long these cases lingered in the courts, especially because the arrests were made over the course of only a few months, Frampton said.

“In some ways, it feels like it just adds insult to injury to have people seeking justice through the courts, when the courts had long ago been effective in dismantling and neutralizing the really exciting organizing that was happening in the streets,” he said.

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“We could not arrest everybody. ...We didn't have sufficient personnel. We tried to arrest those that we thought were leaders and those that were doing most of the noise and encouraging the others.”

— Police Chief Eugene McCain's 1966 testimony about the 1963 demonstrations

Moore-Batson remembers sitting in a Danville courtroom in July 1963, after being arrested for leading a march. She was surrounded by other demonstrators while Aiken lectured them about violating the injunction.

“It was a full house,” Moore-Batson said. “It was a small courtroom, and there were so many of us. I think some of us were able to have a seat, but I remember many of us standing.”

Aiken’s courtroom procedures drew national criticism from Martin Luther King Jr. and the U.S. Department of Justice, among others.

“He excluded virtually the entire public, kept a large force of armed police present, required all defendants to attend roll calls every day, subjected the defendants and their attorneys to daily searches for weapons, and banned discussion of the constitutionality of the injunction,” according to [Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

If a fair judge is the baseline, and if most judges in the South at the time were off baseline, then Aiken was a complete outlier, said Paul Gentry, a Danville historian who volunteers with the Danville Historical Society.

“He was really out of line,” said Joe Scott, an archivist with the historical society. “He was known as the ‘pistol-packing judge.’ He really made his own path.”

But Aiken was praised for his courtroom conduct by others, including the all-white Danville Bar Association, which publicly voiced support for him. The historical society has an entire folder of “fan mail” that Aiken received from elected officials, local businesses, politicians and Virginians throughout the state for his handling of the civil rights movement.

Unsurprisingly, Aiken was widely disliked among the protesters, said Moore-Batson.

“He appeared to me to be an angry little man,” she said. “He yelled and screamed and turned red in the face. And I never heard anyone say anything nice about him.”

But the protesters were not afraid of him, Moore-Batson said.

“I think we kind of expected that behavior,” she said. “For most of us, probably for all of us, it was the first time we had gone to a courtroom to appear in front of a judge.”

There was no jury or testimony involved, she said. It was just Aiken speaking to the group.

“It was not a trial, and I don’t know if you can call it a hearing,” Moore-Batson said. “We just had to appear before him and maybe that was the way they did things. You had to appear so he could tell you why you were arrested.”

Some protesters had official bench trials, took the stand and were cross-examined by prosecutors like City Attorney James Ferguson.

And others still had jury trials. Campbell, Adams, Chase, Dunlap and Pinchback were tried by a jury after they conducted a sit-in at a Danville Howard Johnson’s restaurant and were charged with trespassing.

The all-white jury found the five defendants guilty, sentencing each of them to a \$100 fine. A transcript of this trial is available on microfilm at the Library of Virginia.

Moore-Batson said she didn't ever go to the courthouse outside of her own required appearances, even though she had friends who also had to go to court.

"You have to remember, at that time, I'm not sure if there was a designated section for Black people to sit, because everything was still segregated," she said. "At the courthouse, we couldn't even use the regular elevators. The only elevator that we could use was the freight elevator with the trash cans and all kinds of stuff."

Moore-Batson said she can't remember whether she went to court before or after going to jail, where she spent about a week with other protesters for violating the injunction.

But she does remember being back in court several years later, in the late 1960s. By this point, she had left Danville and was living in New York City, she said.

"I had received a telegram that I needed to be in Danville to appear," Moore-Batson said.

Several other protesters had to appear in court with Moore-Batson, she said. A team of defense attorneys was trying to get the 1963 charges removed from their records.

"I can't remember if that was ever done," she said. "If I remember correctly, they just called out names and we had to take a seat. We never testified or anything like that. Everything was done by the team of attorneys who represented us. I never heard anything more from the federal system or local Danville court after that."

Moore-Batson remembers [Ruth Harvey Charity](#), one of her attorneys, who eventually became the first Black woman on Danville's city council in 1970.

Charity worked with other local and national lawyers on these cases, including Jerry Williams Sr., a local Black attorney. His son, Jerry Williams Jr., is still a practicing attorney in Danville.

The younger Williams was a high schooler during the 1963 protests, like most of the other demonstrators. But he was attending a private high school out of town and wasn't in Danville during the movement.

The night of [Bloody Monday](#), he came back to Danville on a bus because his school year had ended. But his parents didn't want him to participate in the protests.

"I was anxious to get involved, but my parents said, at this juncture, you need to not be involved in this, because you need to go back to school in the fall," he said.

Later in life, his father did share some stories about defending protesters, but they didn't talk about it often, Williams said.

"Occasionally my father would discuss things [about the trials] with my brother and I, but not in detail," he said. "I came back [to Danville] in 1973, and there were still some cases lingering ... but it wasn't as contentious as it had been 10 years before."

Williams, Wilson and Moore-Batson all said that many of the protesters have since died or moved out of town.

“There’s so few of us now,” Moore-Batson said. “People have left and are still leaving.”

That’s one reason it’s important to preserve the court records, said Gaidmore, who now works at the library at the College of William & Mary. He was one of the first archivists assigned to this collection during his time with the Library of Virginia.

“For the families of the protesters, their children, for them to look at individual case files and say, ‘Wow, my father and mother did all they could. They didn’t just sit on the sidelines. They fought for my rights and they participated in this and they experienced violence,’” Gaidmore said.

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“This court has thrown open to us the opportunity to beg pardon. ... I don’t recall reading historically that anybody begged pardon for throwing the tea in Boston Harbor that belonged to and was private property of the East India Company. I don’t remember anybody begging pardon to King George for violating any rule or regulation that he made. ... I have heard no one say that we’re sorry for Negroes being kept in slavery for 350 years, we’re sorry for the 100 years of. ... segregation, denial of equal opportunity, discrimination. Yet, because we struggled legitimately in terms of the American tradition for the things that we believe are rightfully ours, we must be expected to beg pardon.”

— *The Rev. L.W. Chase’s 1966 statement to the court about his participation in the demonstrations. The jury found him guilty of violating the injunction.*

In 1999, Gibson contacted the Library of Virginia to ask them to help preserve this collection. Today, visitors at either the Danville courthouse or the Library of Virginia can look at microfilm transcripts of the court documents and listen to the audio on CD.

The collection spans the 10 years from 1963 to 1973. It includes individual case files for the 254 people arrested and over 85 hours of testimony. While the paper documents cover the entire decade of trials, the audio material only includes trials from 1966 and 1967.

Some of these audio files are mundane — readings of court dockets and roll calls. But some include testimony from protesters, like Paul Price, who describes in one recording how a police officer hit him over the head with a nightstick, and from others involved, like police officers.

The audio files were originally recorded onto Dictabelts by a Dictaphone machine, a recording device that was popular in courtrooms and offices in the 1960s.

A Dictaphone even ran in the judge's chambers and captured arguments between Aiken and the attorneys about a variety of matters, like whether to consolidate cases.

This audio was the “greatest surprise” of the collection, Gibson said. Hearing the voices of the protesters, attorneys, police officers and Aiken is much more powerful than reading written transcripts, he said.

“To me, that was one of the most valuable assets within the whole group of information,” Gibson said.

This audio was converted from its Dictabelt format onto CDs with the help of a grant from the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program.

The grants are funded by a portion of the fees collected by circuit court clerks and awarded to clerks to aid in the preservation of their court records, said Library of Virginia archivist Greg Crawford.

"We were able to work with the [Danville] clerk's office to give them a grant to ... transfer the audio from those antiquated Dictabelts and turn them into digital audio made available on CD," Crawford said.

And now, another project is underway at the library to move both the audio and microfilm images to digitized files online, he said.

So far, the Library of Virginia hasn't gotten many visitors who are interested in this collection, Crawford said. This may be because people don't know about it, or because they are unable to come to the library in person, he said.

"We hope that by making this available online, that will increase the accessibility, because right now, you have to come to the Library of Virginia to look at the microfilm and listen to the audio on CD," Crawford said.

There's no concrete timeline for the digitization projects. But Crawford said he's excited to be able to share these records with a wider audience and make them available to future generations because they are an important part of history.

“Giving everyone’s perspective, not just the county sheriff’s perspective or the white perspective, but all diverse and inclusive perspectives, that’s what the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program is all about.” Crawford said. “There are people’s voices on these records that have been cooped up in a drawer in a courthouse for years, and we’re trying to let those voices be heard.”

A civil rights-era judge was praised for his commitment to segregation. There's still a bridge named after him in Danville.

Judge Archibald Aiken presided over the trials of civil rights protesters arrested in 1963 for demonstrating against segregation. Historians say his discriminatory courtroom practices were extreme even compared to other judges of the era. But he had plenty of fans.

by **Grace Mamon**
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Content warning: Some of the historical texts in this story include racial slurs and racist language.

When the leaders of Danville's civil rights movement are sentenced to jail, there are no spectators in the courtroom gallery. The public has been prohibited from attending trials.

Other than the defendants and their attorneys, there is only the jury, the prosecution, the host of armed policemen, and the 75-year-old judge behind the bench.

Every last one of them is white.

It is 1963, and hundreds of mostly Black demonstrators have been arrested for protesting segregation. They must now face a trial

presided over by Judge Archibald Aiken, a segregationist state court judge known to operate outside the law.

The demonstrators were arrested on charges including contempt, trespassing, disorderly conduct, parading without a permit and resisting arrest.

Aiken's methods were praised by many, including U.S. Senator Harry Byrd, the leader of Virginia's massive resistance campaign that led to the closure of some public schools in the 1950s.

But everyone in Danville's Black community knew that Aiken was a segregationist, said Karice Luck-Brimmer, a local historian and genealogist who leads Black history tours around the city.

"On my tours, I always say the '63 crew were essentially tried by the KKK," Luck-Brimmer said.

While some of Aiken's discriminatory courtroom practices were common throughout the South, others were extreme even among other segregationist judges, said Thomas Frampton, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law who specializes in the intersections of criminal law and race inequalities.

"The proceedings in Danville courtrooms were extraordinary, even by the standards of what one might expect in a Southern, segregationist courtroom," Frampton said. "It's very, very clear that the white legal establishment, from the Danville Bar Association to the judiciary, profoundly failed to do right by the Black population of Danville."

A bridge in Danville remains named after Aiken today.

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Even before the civil rights movement took root in Danville in the early 1960s, Aiken had a reputation as a segregationist because of his commitment to the state's policy of massive resistance.

In 1959, he privately proposed a plan that would use the economic advantage of white folks to “keep the public schools of Virginia permanently open and segregated,” wrote James Ely Jr., a law professor at Vanderbilt University, in an article published in the Vanderbilt Law Review in 1974, a year after the trials had concluded.

Part of his plan included imposing a school tax on every child who attended public school, regardless of race.

Ely's article quotes a letter from Aiken to Byrd in which the judge writes, “I imagine most of the Negroes who have been getting a free education at the expense of the White people either could not and would not pay it.”

Though Aiken's plan was never adopted, Byrd “found it intriguing enough” to circulate it among his colleagues in Washington, according to Ely's article, which discusses the court proceedings and their outcomes as well as Aiken and his methods. It was written to analyze the level of success of civil rights demonstrations, using Danville as a test case.

Aiken, a Danville native and the son of a judge, attended the University of Virginia for his undergraduate and law degrees. He became judge of the Danville Corporation Court in 1950 after serving as a circuit court judge and as the city attorney.

“More than any other person, Judge Aiken symbolized the determination of Danville whites and the city administration to crush the Negro protests,” wrote Ely. “As was the case with nearly all Virginia state judges, Aiken was an ally of Senator Byrd and held conservative social and political views.”

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When civil rights demonstrations broke out in Danville in 1963, Aiken issued a temporary injunction, which later became permanent, that limited protests and public assemblies.

As demonstrators were arrested and tried under this injunction, Aiken’s courtroom practices gained a reputation in the city.

“Everyone in the Black community knew he was a racist,” Luck-Brimmer said, adding that members of the public probably “still don’t know the half” of what he did.

Though protesters and defense attorneys called for federal intervention during the trials, they received very little help. Justice Department officials did monitor the court proceedings, according to Ely’s article, which quotes one official reporting to his superiors, who called the proceedings before Aiken “extraordinary.”

“The judge has entered a formal written order excluding the public from the courtroom,” the quote reads. “Witnesses, and even attorneys, are frisked for weapons. All of the city personnel, however, wear sidearms. The last two days there have been approximately 30 armed police in the courtroom. Judge Aiken has been wearing a pistol while presiding on the bench.”

Aiken denied wearing a gun while on the bench, though he admitted that he carried one to the courthouse on police advice, according to [Encyclopedia Virginia](#). This is how he earned the moniker “the pistol-packing judge,” a nickname that many of his supporters used affectionately.

He also prohibited discussion about the legality of his injunction in the courtroom, Ely wrote, and refused to release convicted defendants on bail.

Most of the trials were bench trials, but the few defendants who had jury trials faced all-white panels. This wasn’t technically legal, but it was still common in the 1960s, said Frampton.

“The intentional exclusion of people from jury service has technically been illegal since Reconstruction,” he said. “But in practice, the rules governing that kind of exclusion were all but meaningless.”

Years later, in 1975, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a jury must be a representative cross section of a community in *Taylor v. Louisiana*. And it wasn’t until 1986, in *Batson v. Kentucky*, that it became unconstitutional to exclude jurors solely on the basis of race.

According to trial transcripts, Aiken disregarded the defense’s opposition to the all-white juries.

In a 1963 case, defense attorney Len W. Holt motioned for a new trial several times, arguing that Black residents had been excluded from the list of potential jurors. He was defending five of the movement’s leaders, who had been charged with trespassing after a sit-in at a Howard Johnson’s restaurant.

Holt said that there had been “a clear, systematic exclusion of Negroes from the venire list,” which had 500 names, 475 of which were white.

Aiken overruled the motions, saying, “Your evidence is based on hearsay ... the court will not consider it on that evidence,” according to the transcript.

The jury found the five defendants — Julius Adams, the Rev. Lawrence Campbell, the Rev. L.W. Chase, the Rev. A.I. Dunlap and Arthur Pinchback — guilty of trespassing and sentenced each to a \$100 fine.

Frampton said that the local legal system was “at the vanguard” of the “effort of massive resistance against civil rights” in Danville.

And today, “courts can still be responsible for continuing to reinforce racial subordination,” he said. “It’s past time for us to have a really long, hard reckoning with the ways in which lawyers and the courts have a fairly shameful legacy in these historical moments.”

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Aiken’s actions drew criticism from the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Justice Department, which issued a brief condemning his conduct shortly after trials began in 1963.

But he also received much praise from local businesses and organizations, including the Danville Bar Association, other state judges — and even a member of the U.S. Congress.

In a [“personal and confidential” 1963 letter](#) from Byrd to Aiken, the senator commends the “courageous and wonderful fashion in which

you have met the very unwarranted actions taken by the NAACP in Danville. The whole State has been proud of you.”

Moscoe Huntley, a judge for the Hustings Court of the City of Richmond, [also wrote Aiken a letter of support](#). “You have really gone through some trying times, and I know you have experienced many difficulties,” the 1967 letter reads. “The purpose of this note is to express my admiration for you in your present situation.”

And [a 1963 letter to Aiken from Dr. William Watkins](#) at the South Boston Clinic reads, “I am anxious for you to know that everyone in this section of the state is most proud of your record and the wonderful job that you are doing.”

These and [many other letters of support](#) are housed at the Danville Historical Society. Aiken kept much of his fan mail, the historical society’s archivists said, including [an autographed picture of George Wallace](#), the Alabama governor and notorious segregationist.

Aiken only kept one note that was critical of his actions, a postcard that reads: “You are the one causing all this trouble in our fair Virginia with your stupid injunctions. Instead of using the law to protect human rights you use it against people. You would like to send the Negroes to crematoriums like the judges in Germany did. Mrs. George Allen, Fairfax, Virginia.”

The historical society’s collection of Aiken’s personal items, like these letters, was largely donated by members of Aiken’s family after his death.

Aiken died in 1971 of a heart attack, two years before the final cases from the summer of 1963 were heard. The judge who took over the cases suspended the jail sentences on the condition of good behavior, against the prosecutor's objections.

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While many white people in Danville and beyond expressed support for Aiken during this time, there was one white man, with family roots in Virginia tracing back to Thomas Jefferson, who was outspoken against the judge.

“My grandfather fired off a note to Judge Aiken in the middle of these court proceedings,” said Tess Taylor, an author and granddaughter of W. Leigh Taylor, who was the director of education and training at Dan River Mills during the civil rights movement.

Leigh Taylor's 1966 letter referred to Aiken's “petulance” and called his decisions “inane.” Ely's article calls this letter and its aftermath “the Taylor affair.”

“Aiken reacted swiftly, ordering the arrest of Taylor on a charge of contempt of the judge of the court,” Ely wrote.

Charles Taylor, Leigh Taylor's son and Tess Taylor's father, remembers being in high school when his father was arrested at his mill office. Aiken and Leigh Taylor had been acquaintances before this, Charles Taylor said, because they both belonged to the same Rotary group.

“I’m not saying they were close friends, but they weren’t total strangers,” he said.

Leigh Taylor was tried, found in contempt and sentenced to 10 days at the city prison farm (eight of which were suspended) and a \$50 fine.

This sentence was very similar to the sentences handed out to demonstrators, which is telling, said Tess Taylor.

“The identity of the sentence was really important, because it’s saying, ‘You’re either with us or with them, and you broke ranks, therefore you’re with them,’” she said.

In a free society, judges are not immune from criticism, Ely’s article says.

“There can be no doubt that Aiken’s behavior toward Taylor was a serious error which curtailed constitutionally protected freedom of speech and reflected negatively on his judicial temperament,” it says.

Tess Taylor, in a New York Times [op-ed](#) from 2013, wrote that her grandfather’s trial actually garnered more local press coverage than the first demonstrations did.

“In contrast to names like Lawrence and Gloria Campbell’s that the paper had refused to dignify, his name made the paper, not only in Danville, but in Richmond, Roanoke, Greensboro, N.C., and Washington,” she wrote. “Some lawyers in Danville ran counter-editorials defending Judge Aiken and mocking my grandfather.”

The disproportionate amount of attention this case drew relative to the demonstrations themselves indicates the “unevenness of people’s attention to justice,” Tess Taylor said.

“It made it seem like that was the moment where [Aiken] crossed the line,” she said. “It wasn’t all of the other really terrible things that [Aiken] had already done vis-à-vis Black people. It was that he now dared to contradict and engage a white person of good standing with a good family.”

A few months later, in early 1967, Aiken suspended Leigh Taylor’s jail sentence, although not the fine.

Still, Charles and Tess Taylor said there was “a chilling effect” on their family in the community afterwards.

“People who were the closest to us, who really understood my father, they did not reject him,” Charles Taylor said. But others in the community who didn’t know the family as well kept their distance, he said.

Leigh Taylor, who was in his 40s when this happened, never got another promotion at Dan River Mills. He was “effectively sidelined,” his son said, and he worked in the same position for the next 20 years.

And the “pejorative” media coverage did not help, Charles Taylor said. “We were all hurt by that,” he said. “But I was proud of my father.”

Part of this pride comes from the fact that Leigh Taylor represented a shift in the history of the Taylor family, which dates to the 1700s in Virginia and has roots in slaveholding and the Confederacy.

Leigh Taylor's grandfather was a Confederate colonel during the Civil War and was taken prisoner by the Union after leading a charge at the Battle of Gettysburg, Charles Taylor said.

"My father spoke out coming from a major family with a certain sense of prestige," he said. "It took a little extra courage, and it was a crucible for him. But he felt that what the judge was doing was wrong."

Still, Leigh Taylor was not a hero, his granddaughter said.

"Unlike Mr. Campbell, he did not plan to put his life on the line," she wrote in her op-ed. "He set out as a privileged person expecting to be heard, and ended as a privileged person surprised by backlash. But he did speak up. He was then used as an example of what could happen even to a white man of standing if he stepped out of line. And, in his own way, he spent his life paying for it."

Tess Taylor spoke with Campbell, who died in March, back in 2013 — about 50 years after the movement.

"I was surprised to find that Reverend Campbell remembered my grandfather and his gesture," she said. "When he told me that it was still a meaningful gesture to him 50 years later, I just wept."

Campbell told her he can count on one hand the number of white people in Danville who said anything at all to support the movement, she said.

"Sometimes I am proud of my grandfather," she wrote in her op-ed. "Sometimes I feel, painfully, that his act was not enough. In some ways, his efforts are beside the point. But in other ways, they offer me

a window into what presses down on a culture that is struggling to change.”

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Over the Dan River and the city’s riverwalk trail, the Aiken Bridge carries about 400 feet of U.S. 29 Business through Danville. The bridge was dedicated in 1969 and built in 1970.

WBTM News, which covered [the designation](#), reported that the Danville City Council referred to Aiken as “a paragon of integrity, courage, brilliance, and justice — a man of great but modest stature, who, during his very useful life, has rendered monumental services to both his community and nation.”

This report, also housed at the Danville Historical Society, [goes on to say that the city council “has chosen wisely”](#) to name the bridge after Aiken and commends him for his “timely and courageous action” against “forces bent on turmoil and destruction.”

Fifty-six years later, the bridge across the Dan River remains named “The Archibald M. Aiken Bridge.”

Paul Gentry, a local historian and volunteer with the historical society, said he’d be willing to bet that most residents, especially young people, don’t know the history behind the name.

“The generation that knew him for who he was has pretty much aged out,” said Cody Foster, historical society archivist. “[Aiken’s] story has almost been left in the past, except for being associated with the civil rights movement and overseeing those proceedings.”

Elder members of the Black community remember Aiken and know about the history behind the bridge, said Luck-Brimmer, but none of them call it by name.

Brief talk about changing the name came up in the community a few years ago, Luck-Brimmer said, but she hasn't heard anything about it recently.

Renaming is a "touchy" subject in Danville, said Larry Campbell, a city councilman and the son of the Rev. Campbell, one of the movement's major leaders.

He referenced the debate almost 10 years ago about the Confederate flag that used to fly in front of the Danville Fine Arts and History Museum, which is housed in the Sutherlin Mansion. The building was the temporary residence of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States of America, during the last days of the Civil War.

The debate was very contentious. Campbell said he remembers being threatened before a city council vote on the matter by an anonymous group.

"I will never forget, I was in Yanceyville, and I got a call from the [police] chief's office," Campbell said. "He said, 'You need to come down to the station, quick.' The police had received some information that if I voted [to remove the flag], they would do some things to me and my family."

Campbell said there have also been conversations in Danville about the statue of Harry Wooding, a Confederate soldier who was the mayor for over 40 years, on the steps of the Municipal Building. But he

doesn't remember any specific calls to change the name of Aiken bridge.

City Manager Ken Larking also said that he doesn't recall any resident bringing up the name of the bridge as a concern.

Gentry said a call for a name change "will probably fall into the category of, if nobody's fussing, let's not open that can of worms." Plus, "if you want to be 100% politically correct, you would have to change so many things in this town, it'd be ridiculous," he said.

Campbell said renaming the bridge might just "stir up trouble ... especially with the mentality of our country right now."

Too many people, he said, are too eager for any excuse to start a fight.

"They're just waiting for a spark," he said.

Two things that Campbell knows for sure: "These are some crazy times. And racism is not dead, period."

Portrait of segregationist Danville judge removed from courtroom, at least for now

A Danville public defender said he'd considered requesting that Archibald Aiken's portrait be removed before, but it was "difficult to justify stirring up an issue" others saw as settled. Recent coverage of the segregationist judge prompted him to act.

by **Grace Mamon**
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For decades, seven portraits have hung along the back wall of the larger of two circuit courtrooms in Danville, looking down on jury trials from behind the gallery. Now, there are only six.

A portrait of Archibald Aiken, the segregationist judge who presided over the trials of hundreds of civil rights protesters in the 1960s, was removed last week at the request of Lee Smallwood, a deputy public defender in Danville.

Aiken, who died in 1971, is no longer a well-known figure in the city. But Smallwood was familiar with Aiken's reputation and discriminatory courtroom practices: The judge had barred the public from attending trials, excluded Black residents from juries, kept armed policemen in the courtroom — and even carried a gun into the courtroom himself.

And as information about Aiken and his methods has become more available to the public — including through [a recent Cardinal News story](#) — Smallwood said he's grown concerned about how the judge's likeness in the courtroom would impact trials.

“This portrait was literally hanging closest to the jury for everybody to see, and I think when people are attuned to that, it can have a chilling effect,” Smallwood said. “It’s just not a risk that I feel can be taken.”

Presiding Judge Joseph Milam granted Smallwood’s motion and ordered the portrait removed, at least temporarily, from the large courtroom where most jury trials are held. Smallwood is now working to create a committee that will decide which portraits, if any, should stay or go — including Aiken’s.

This week wasn’t the first time Smallwood thought about asking to have Aiken’s image taken down, he said.

“I have long contemplated filing a motion asking for the portrait to be removed,” he said. “But I’ve felt that what I would likely hear is that nobody knows anything about that.”

Many people, even in Danville, are unaware of the details of the city’s civil rights movement of 1963, which was met with fierce opposition and police brutality. This is in large part because of a lack of thorough coverage of the movement at the time, and a lack of meaningful acknowledgement from the city in the following decades.

Likely even fewer people know about Aiken and his methods during the civil rights court proceedings, which lasted for years even after the movement ended.

More than 200 defendants, almost all of whom were Black, were tried by Aiken on a host of charges including contempt, trespassing, disorderly conduct, assault, parading without a permit and resisting arrest. Most of these charges came under the umbrella of violating an injunction, issued by Aiken, that limited the scope of public demonstrations.

The judge had earned a reputation as a segregationist due to his opposition to public school integration, even before the civil rights movement. This reputation grew during the movement, sparking both praise and backlash. A bridge in Danville remains named after Aiken today.

Some who are aware of these stories don't want to see them brought up again.

“There's a real pragmatism in this community in terms of, ‘That's in the past, it's best not to stir it up,’” Smallwood said.

Smallwood understands this perspective, he said, but as the general public becomes more knowledgeable about the civil rights movement and about Aiken, he started to think about the effect it would have in the courtroom.

[The Danville Historical Society](#), which has a lot of material about Aiken, is more accessible to the public than ever before, making it easier for residents to learn about him.

“What I'm concerned about is the type of trial my clients can get,” Smallwood said. “If there is something that, by and large, the public doesn't know anything about, that's one thing.”

But if there's increased information available [about Aiken online](#), and if people start to learn more about him, that's another thing, he said.

Though his priority is making sure his clients get a fair trial, Smallwood said that he's also in favor of "righting past wrongs," and that the removal of Aiken's portrait might work toward that end.

Milam was receptive to his request, Smallwood said, and immediately removed the portrait, which hung alongside six others in the larger of the two circuit courtrooms in Danville's courthouse.

Similar conversations about portraits in Virginia courthouses have popped up across the state in recent years.

In 2015, then-Judge Martin Clark, who is now retired, ordered the removal of a portrait of Jeb Stuart, a Confederate States Army general during the Civil War, from a Patrick County courtroom.

These conversations became more prevalent in 2020, in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, Smallwood said.

That year, judges in Louisa County and Fairfax County ordered portraits of Robert E. Lee removed.

"In Fairfax, they actually removed all of the portraits of all of the judges from the courtroom where they were having jury trials," Smallwood said.

Seeing this happen in other localities, Smallwood was inclined to research the subjects of the portraits in Danville's courtroom, specifically Aiken.

And now, Smallwood is putting together a committee that will help Milam and other judges make decisions about all of the portraits that hang in the courthouse. Among the other portraits is one of Aiken's father, Archibald Aiken Sr., who was also a judge in Danville.

"[Milam] indicated that he wanted a group of smart people to give him guidance on what to do," Smallwood said.

The committee will likely be a combination of local historians and local legal experts, he said, to make sure there's an "interdisciplinary approach" to these discussions.

Milam declined to comment until official decisions are made about the portraits.

But Smallwood said he appreciated Milam's attentiveness to an issue that he finds so important. "It's just something that I couldn't let lie dormant," he said.