

Class photos offer memories, nostalgia

By CHERYL WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

The Atkins High School class pictures gracing the walls at the East Winston Branch Library depict hundreds of faces, some grave and intense, some carefree and composed.

But all are reminders of times past.

Enclosed in wooden frames, the pictures of the graduating classes span the years 1930 to 1970.

The pictures are on display in the main reading room, the hallway and the auditorium at the East Winston Library on 1110 E. Seventh St.

The display is made available through the efforts of the Society for the Study of Afro-American History in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County and the alumni of Atkins High School.

"Most of these pictures stayed in the halls of Atkins until integration," said Joseph E. Bradshaw, a retired history teacher.

"Then they were taken down because Atkins was reduced to a high school rather than a senior high school."

Included in the display is a picture of the Columbian Heights Class of 1930. Columbian Heights was the first black public high school in the city, Bradshaw said.

This picture is included in the display because it came over to Atkins High School along with some other memorabilia.

When the pictures at Atkins were taken down, their frames took up too much space, so the pictures were removed from the frames and stored, Bradshaw said.

"What happened to the frames we do not know," he said. "But we do know the pictures were stacked together. Some of them were given to individuals."

"Most of the pictures were found and are now hanging in the branch library," he said.

Tim Jackson, head librarian at the East Winston Branch

Library, said that the members of a committee that was formed about 20 years ago said that they would be responsible for taking the pictures and having them displayed in a public place.

"For some reason that never happened," he said. "The pictures ended up going back to the school system."

About two years ago, Jackson said that he was contacted by a school official who wanted to know if he would be willing to display the pictures.

Jackson said that he was willing, but only if the pictures were framed.

Jackson said that through the efforts of the society and Atkins alumni, funds were secured for the framing of the pictures.

The pictures will be on permanent display at the library.

So far about 25 people have come by to look at the pictures, Jackson said. He said that not many people know that the pictures are there.

Bradshaw said that Atkins High School was completed in



Tim Jackson, left, head librarian, Patricia Brown, library staff member, and Joseph Bradshaw display one of the photos of the Atkins High School graduating classes, now on display at the East Winston Branch Library. Bradshaw points to himself on the photograph (photo by James Parker).

April 1931. In the early years there were two graduating classes, one in January and one in June.

Bradshaw said that the only yearbook printed during the 1930s was printed for the Class of 1932.

The members of the Columbian Heights class that came over to the school immediately after it was built completed their senior year at Atkins in 1931. Although they attended the school for about two months and graduated in the school's auditorium, the

class of 1932 is considered to be the first official graduating class, Bradshaw said.

"The 1931 picture was made at Atkins High School because they were there the last two months of the school year," he said.

Hairston

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dividuals were expected to speak out," he said. "Of course, I did."

"We wasted a lot of time getting nothing done," he said. "There was a lot of money being spent and wasted. I haven't seen anything positive. I can only say, I was in Leadership Winston-Salem. So what?"

If the group had been a policy-making body or had some clout, that might have made a difference, Hairston said. "But just trying to change individuals' minds a few at a time is something else," he said. Hairston said that if the purpose of the group was to meet and air views, then it was successful.

"There's no point in airing views and then business as usual when you get home," he said.

There are problems in the city and county, but Leadership Winston-Salem will not solve them, Hairston said.

"We need to meet with blacks to get them to understand we need to keep our black children from having babies, from crime and from drugs," he said. "Let's make blacks more responsible."

"We are the ones who have to solve our problems," he said. "Nobody gives you anything that they didn't need or want themselves."

Most black participants, however, felt that Leadership Winston-Salem was a unique experience that afforded them the opportunity to meet people and to become better acquainted with all aspects of the city.

Dr. Barbara K. Phillips, assistant to the superintendent of the city/county school system, said that the program was "a very rich experience. ... I got to know many people better."

"Each day is so structured," she said. "You can't help but come out more knowledgeable."

The Rev. Carlton A.G. Eversley, pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, said that for him the experience was very informative.

"I learned about different aspects of the city I didn't otherwise know," he said. "I learned the business and marketing strategy of the city."

While many people came away from the group with comments about all the friends they had made, friendship was not what Eversley was seeking.

"What black folks need are solutions," he said. "I don't need someone to pat me on the back or to slap me five in my hand."

There was some substantive discussion in Leadership Winston-Salem, Eversley said. The question, he said, is whether there will be any substantive action.

Irene P. Hairston, a retired educator with the city/county school system, said that Leadership Winston-Salem provided a forum where people could speak

candidly and yet maintain good relationships.

Mrs. Hairston said that she went into the program with preconceived notions about some of the participants, but that the discussions enabled her to understand others' views. "It (the program) was like a sensitivi-

ty session," she said.

James E. Mack, president of HRC Inc., said that he gained a new appreciation of Winston-Salem and its people from the program.

"There were some programs going on in the city, such as the

juvenile program in the courts, of which I knew very little," he said. "I came away from a session on the juvenile justice system more enlightened and encouraged."

East Ward Alderman Virginia K. Newell said that from Leadership Winston-Salem she learned

about problems that black and white people share.

"I'm a very positive person," she said. "... I fundamentally believe in people. I think we can make a better interracial community."

Four other black participants,

Fire Chief Lester Ervin, Thomas J. Elijah, Isaiiah Tidwell and Dr. Velma G. Watts, also had positive comments about their participation in the program.

Verlee J. Fowler, who also participated in the program, could not be reached for comment.

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