

THE CHRONICLE

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Linville sworn in as Forsyth County's first black Clerk of Court

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

During a special ceremony on Monday June 8, Winston-Salem native Renita Thompkins Linville was sworn in as the Forsyth County Clerk of Court, making her the first African American to hold the position.

Appointed by Superior Court Judge Todd L. Burke to replace the vacancy left by Susan Frye who retired earlier this year, Linville has 36 years of experience in the courtroom. A graduate of Reynolds High School, Linville graduated cum laude from NC Central University (NCCU) before earning her juris doctorate from Howard University Law School.

When discussing her appointment with The Chronicle, Linville said it's something she never imagined would happen. When it was suggested to her by a friend to apply for the position, Linville said she was planning to close her practice and work fulltime with her husband, who is the pastor of Piney Grove Baptist Church.

"A couple of months ago I was just planning on closing my office. I knew that God was calling for me to do something else, I just didn't know what it



Photos by Tevin Stinson

During a special ceremony earlier this week Renita Thompkins Linville was sworn in as the Forsyth County Clerk of Court.

was. One of the things I said I could do was go over to Piney Grove and do fulltime ministry and work on some projects that are close to my heart. But it was suggested to me by a friend to consider applying for the clerk of court's office. I did and I was appointed. And I don't think anybody was more shocked than me," Linville laughed.

Aside from her years of experience in the courtroom as an attorney and the top-tier education she received from NCCU and Howard, Linville credits the life lessons passed down from her mother and father as major factors to her success.

Linville's father, David L. Thompkins, was the first African American to serve as executive

director of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem. She said growing up her father instilled in her the importance of helping those who are less fortunate and that's how she has lived her life and intends to approach her position as clerk of court.

"Those lessons of giving back and helping others that my

parents taught me stuck with me and after I left Howard, I came back home to make a difference," she continued. "I think my entire life prepared me for this."

Before Linville took the oath of office, several dignitaries, former colleagues, and loved ones took turns congratulating Forsyth County's new Clerk of Court. One of the first to wish Linville good luck was The Honorable Cheri Beasley, Chief Justice of the N.C. Supreme Court.

Beasley, who was appointed by Governor Roy Cooper earlier this year, said the clerk of court serves as the gateway to helping people to best resolve their issues and utilize the court system and Linville will be a perfect fit for the position.

"I know you will serve well," said Beasley, while addressing Linville.

"I know you understand that you will be tasked with making sure we're all informed of what is going on here in Forsyth County in the courtroom," she continued. "In the court system we make sure we are dealing with people and appreciating their sense of humanity and treat them with dignity, regardless of why they come before the court. I know you have a heart for the

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Ronnie Long waiting patiently on U.S. Court of Appeals decision

Long, 63, has been in prison since he was 19 years old for a crime he says he didn't commit

BY TEVIN STINSON
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On March 20, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit in Richmond, Va., heard oral arguments on the behalf of Ronnie Long, a North Carolina man who has been in jail for 43 years for a crime he says he didn't commit. While the U.S. Court of Appeals usually adheres to a 75-day timeframe to make decisions, it's been 113 days and Long is still waiting to hear from the Fourth Circuit Court.

But Long, who is a native of Concord, is staying optimistic. When asked about the outcome earlier this week, Long said he likes his chances.

"I feel as though they are taking their time doing what they do about applying the law. I'm hoping that this time we can get it right. I feel as though the longer it takes, the better my chances are," Long said.

Long's loved ones have grown to become patient

as well, including his wife AsLeigh, who married Long in 2014 after leaving UNC Chapel Hill to pursue Long's case full-time. She said the waiting can be hard, but she has unwillingly learned to have patience.

"I've only been in this fight for a little over six years now. I have unwillingly learned how to have patience. Just ask Ronnie's attorney, Jamie Lau. He's had to put up with me getting upset with things not going fast enough, but I've finally learned the life skill of patience," she continued. "Waiting sucks, it absolutely sucks, especially when I know that Ronnie is completely innocent."

The Facts

On April 25, 1976, in Concord, a 54-year-old white woman reported that she had been raped by a "yellow-looking" African American man wearing a leather jacket. According to police reports, the victim, who was the widow of a top executive at Cannon Mills, a major textile company and employer in the area, told police her attacker came through an open window before pressing a knife against her neck and ripping her clothes off.

Two weeks following the incident and after the victim was unable to

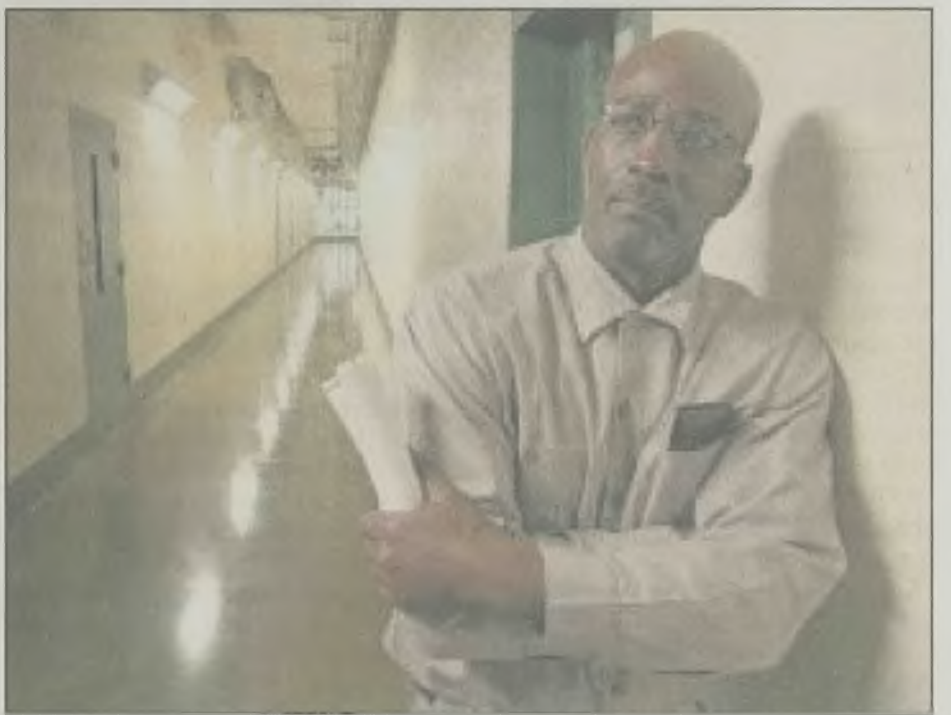
pick her attacker out of a photo lineup, investigators with the Concord Police Department took the victim, who was wearing a wig, to the courthouse, told her that her attacker may or may not be in the courtroom, and asked her to identify anyone who looked "familiar."

On that same day, 19-year-old Ronnie Long was in court to settle a minor trespassing charge. Long had no idea he was being watched, but as soon as Long stood up wearing a leather jacket, the victim identified him as her attacker. She later picked Long out in a photo lineup where he was the only one wearing a leather jacket.

Later that day, officers showed up at Long's house and told him he had to go down to the station to sign papers relating to the trespassing charge and that he would be back shortly. He hasn't been back home since.

The Trial

Even before the trial began, it seemed as if it was set up to put the then 19-year-old teenager away for life. Many people believe the police and prosecutors were under pressure to catch the predator because of the victim's ties to one of the areas top businesses.



Submitted photo

Ronnie Long is waiting on a response from the U.S. Court of Appeals. Long has been in prison for 43 years for a crime he says he didn't commit.

Those who have fought for Long's release argue that significant evidence was just ignored in Long's initial trial including an SBI report that proves Long's leather jacket and gloves had no trace of fibers from the crime scene, hairs on the victim's clothes did not match Long's, and a fingerprint lifted from the scene did not match Long.

An alibi that placed Long at home planning a high school reunion party

was ignored as well.

The States' case was based solely on the fact that Long was black and owned a leather jacket, toboggan and gloves.

It is also important to note that the jury in Long's trial was selected out of more than 40 potential jurors that included less than five African Americans. In the end, Long was tried by an all white jury including several who had ties to Cannon Mills. And on

October 1, 1976, Long was condemned to serve two life sentences in the N.C. Department of Corrections.

His projected release date is April 20, 2056. If he's still alive, Long will be approaching his 100th birthday.

When discussing the trial with students from Winston-Salem State University via phone call earlier this year, Long said he put his faith in a system

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