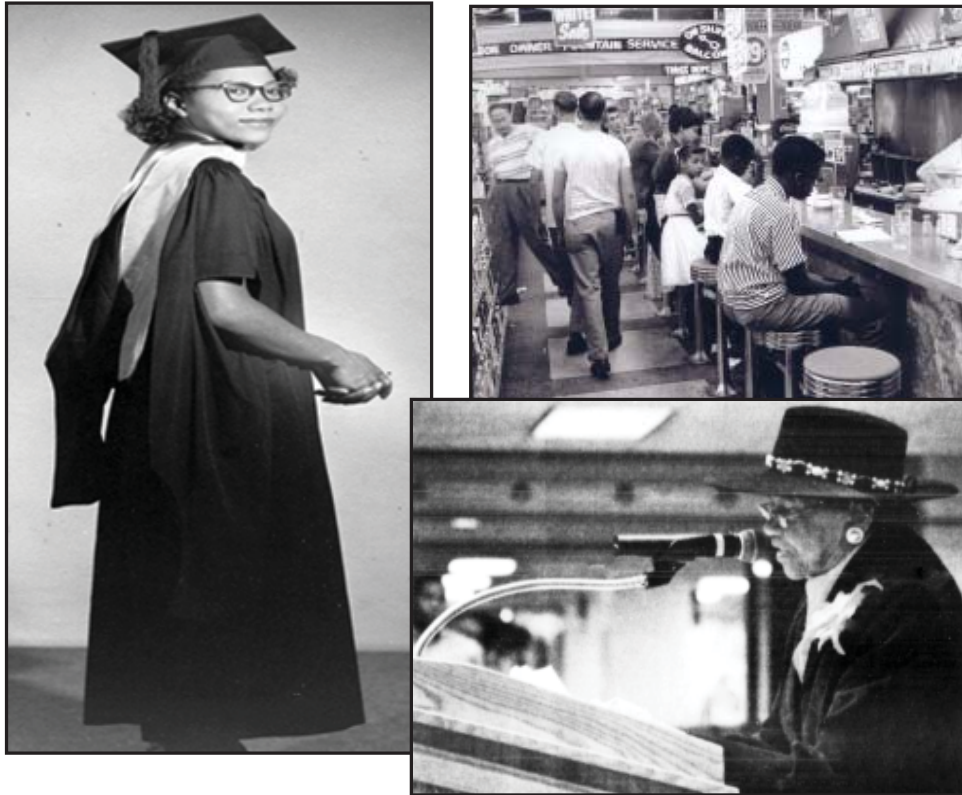


## Unforgotten Trailblazer: Nancy O. Randolph Davis



*By Gloria J. Pollard\**

When one hears the words “civil rights” in Oklahoma City, images of Clara Luper with her select group of youths sitting at Katz Drug Store immediately come to mind.<sup>1</sup> The youngsters being loaded into paddy wagons and taken to jail for “sitting in” at businesses that refused to serve them is also a part of that collection of mental pictures. One can hardly forget the violence waged against those brave souls, violence that also included among the images. By visiting the Oklahoma History Center located in Oklahoma City, a person may learn of Nancy Davis’s role in the civil rights movement.<sup>2</sup> Her actions present her in a different setting from Luper’s. Davis’s stand did not result in extreme violence but in a relatively smooth transition for minorities into one of Oklahoma’s higher education institutions.

One isolated, historical event may propel an individual into a public sphere that deprives that person of the total privacy needed to lead a

simple life with family and friends. Some people are able to maneuver publicity to the advantage of self and others. Breaking ground for young people to enter Oklahoma A&M's Graduate College in 1949 represented such an event for Nancy Ola Randolph Davis.<sup>3</sup> She had been employed at Dunjee High School as a home economics teacher.<sup>4</sup> The school, named for *Black Dispatch* editor Roscoe Dunjee, had been established in Choctaw, Oklahoma, in 1935 under Principal A. M. Tompkins. Ironically, the principal was father-in-law to Dr. A. L. Dowell, who later challenged Oklahoma City Public School's segregated system. Davis anticipated continuing her teaching career following her graduation from Oklahoma A&M with a Master of Arts and Sciences degree. Fortunately, her path took a turn when she encountered a fellow Dunjee High School teacher, Clara Luper, who had a different road onto which Nancy Davis was to diverge—that of civil rights.

The Randolph family migrated from Colbert, Oklahoma, to Sapulpa, Oklahoma, in 1919. They quickly discovered themselves to be relegated to segregated schools, theaters, water fountains, and all other public accommodations. Similar to other towns in Oklahoma, signs were posted indicating that public facilities were to be used based on separate black and white race designations. Davis described the colored restrooms in the Sapulpa bus station as always filthy. The black patrons could only enter the movie theater through the back entrance and proceed to the balcony which Davis said her father called “an old chicken coop.” Additionally, eating in a public restaurant was out of the question. Black patrons either had to stand to the side of the counter or take food to go through a back window. Because segregation was both *de jure* and *de facto* in Oklahoma, the citizens adhered to it and remained in their respective places.<sup>5</sup> Many of these segregation laws were enacted in Oklahoma as early as 1890 and continued until 1950.

The Depression era affected the Randolph family in much the same way it did others in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Davis's father lost his job with the Frisco Railroad Company. Instead of seeking assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), instituted in 1935, he productively farmed and cared for his family until he was rehired by the railroad company.<sup>7</sup> His independent character was bequeathed to Nancy who, years later, helped her husband with gardening and raising a vineyard. Such efforts offered resources for her home economics classes at Dunjee High School. Homes in this economically strapped eastern Oklahoma County community benefited from her contributions which often made their way into the kitchens of her students or other needy families nearby.<sup>8</sup> She offered vivid descriptions of the community families' situations in her master's thesis.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

*Roscoe Dunjee, painting by J. Oxford (11901, Sam Flood Collection, OHS Research Division).*



In spite of the challenges of her early social situation in Sapulpa, Davis maintained fond memories of family life in that small town. Her parents' insistence that education and faith were the pivotal elements to success remained foremost in her efforts in the classroom and in her civil rights participation. Life for Davis did not represent an idyllic time, but it was one about which she, as the youngest Randolph child, loved to reminisce. She often refers to the closeness of her family as they performed assigned chores at home, completed school expectations, worshipped together in church, and overcame tragic events.

Until her senior year in high school, Davis had been an outstanding student. Unfortunately, she inherited the duties of helping to care for four young nephews in her last year. Her oldest brother, with his wife and children, had come to spend the Christmas holidays with the Randolph family. While there, Davis's sister-in-law became ill with three-day pneumonia and died. This incident devastated the family who took it upon themselves to help care for the children. Davis spent much of her study time assisting her mother with the four little ones who were aged four months, two years, four years, and six years respectively. This task took a heavy toll on her, both physically and mentally. Her grades during this senior year barely allowed her to graduate. Despite this setback, she completed high school at Booker T. Washington in

NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

Sapulpa. With support from her siblings and parents, she was able to enroll at Langston University for the fall 1944 term.<sup>9</sup>

Her mother's and her grandmother's insistent guidance to look people in the eye when she spoke to them was echoed by her future friend and confidante, Clara Luper. Davis and Luper's students never forgot this order, especially during their training for the sit-ins and moments following acceptance into integration of schools and public accommodations. Davis said that she demonstrated her parents' idea of success by following three rules: "Never give up. If you want to be somebody, you can. If you take one step, God will help you take the second step."<sup>10</sup>

While at Langston University, Davis excelled academically and became deeply involved in campus extracurricular life. During her last year at Langston, not aware of what the future held for her, Davis completed her studies and went on to become a career educator. In later years, the university would recognize her as one of the founders and president of the Home Economics Alumni Association.<sup>11</sup> During one such program on August 12, 2009, Langston University's President JoAnn Haysbert included kudos to Davis for her contributions to the university. One of the staff, Dr. Marvin Burns, introduced Davis as an "Alumnus Extraordinaire." He spoke highly of her position as president of Langston University's Home Economics Alumni Association for twenty-seven years. As a loyal supporter of Langston University, Davis has been an ardent recruiter. She encouraged students to attend the institution and even worked with the university to secure hefty

*Boys dormitory at Langston University, 1890-1916 (4189, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS Research Division).*



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

*Davis's graduation with her bachelor of arts in home economics from Langston University in 1948 (photograph courtesy of Nancy Lynn Davis).*



scholarships for all Star Spencer students who expressed an interest in attending Langston University.

Following her 1948 graduation from Langston, she procured a position at the all-black Dunjee Public School in Choctaw, Oklahoma. As was typical of black schools at that time, teachers used second-hand books and equipment to produce some of the most successful professionals in the country. Hilton Kelly offers current perspectives on the subject of Black schools during the Jim Crow era. In this work, Kelly shares results from oral histories and interviews with a specified group of Southern black teachers regarding school conditions for black teachers and students. The information in this work is comparable to the situation that existed at the Dunjee School.<sup>12</sup> Being a product of, and teacher in, this type of system, Davis set to work with some of her fellow colleagues—Clara Luper, Geneva Smith and W. B. Parker—to guide students toward a more productive life than the one their parents had previously experienced in personal, work and social lifestyles.<sup>13</sup> In addition to being classroom teachers at Dunjee, the three named individuals contributed greatly to the community in general. Clara Luper and W. B. Parker became well-known civil rights activists and humanitarians in Oklahoma. Geneva Jolly Smith, as Dunjee band instructor and director of Dunjee's Proud 85, has been remembered by

## NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

former teachers and alumni as writer of both the school alma mater and the school fight song.<sup>14</sup>

The Dunjee community recognized Davis as an exceptional teacher because of her ability to involve them, along with their children, in promoting home improvement. She taught the students and required them to implement the skills they learned when they returned home. This process endeared her to the neighborhood of which she would become a member in 1953 by marrying one of its own, Fred C. Davis, who was a fellow educator with Davis at Dunjee. Together they were destined to parent and raise two children who would spend nearly as much time at Dunjee as did their parents. As a matter of fact, many of Nancy Davis's former students still laugh about babysitting the two children.



*Davis's graduation with her master of arts degree in home economics from Oklahoma State University, 1952 (photograph courtesy of Nancy Lynn Davis).*

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

During her first year teaching at Dunjee, Davis had a desire to continue her own education. Because teaching demanded so much of her time during the regular school year, she decided to use her 1949 summer break to seek enrollment at Oklahoma State University (OSU). She attended summer school until she received her master of science degree in home economics over a period of four years. As a single young professional, Davis consulted her parents about finance, transportation, room and board, and time when she made her plans. She did not anticipate the widespread results of her simple goal to further her education. With money that she was able to save from teaching and support from her family, Davis financed her studies. She was fortunate enough to have Stillwater friends who welcomed her into their homes during her matriculation at OSU, because commuting from Choctaw to Stillwater would certainly have placed a hardship on her. During this first year of teaching, Davis had been rooming with Geneva Jolly Smith, a close friend from her hometown. This situation was amiable and convenient during the school year. It resumed following each summer session in Stillwater.<sup>15</sup>

Upon her first encounter with the OSU dean of home economics, Davis received an unexpected rebuff. The dean told her that Negroes were pushing too hard; she suggested that Davis should go to Kansas, Colorado, or some other state where she would be accepted. This practice of sending black students to other states for higher education to support segregation was not new. It is also described by Alton Bobbitt as he is interviewed by Hilton Kelly, author of *Race, Remembering, and Jim Crow Teachers* (2010): “The state [of North Carolina] would pay you to go out of state, so there were teachers who went out to University of Kansas, Penn State University, New York University, and City College.”<sup>16</sup> From childhood, Davis had been a respectful individual, but she possessed a strong will. Because of her determination to enter OSU, she was able to speak with acquaintances who enlisted persons of influence to intervene on her behalf.<sup>17</sup>

Two such individuals were Roscoe Dunjee (1883-1965), the editor of the *Black Dispatch* and a noted civil rights leader from Oklahoma City, and attorney Amos T. Hall, a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lawyer from Tulsa. Steve Lackmeyer presents an excellent profile of Roscoe Dunjee as a “Fighter for Equality.” Amos T. Hall (1896-1971) served as a civil rights lawyer and an attorney for the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. He also served as a district judge for Tulsa County.<sup>18</sup> These powerful black dignitaries visited with officials at OSU in a private meeting. Details of that 1949 meeting in support of Davis were not revealed to her or others out-

side of that session. Based on the activities and reputations of these two outstanding men, it is not surprising to note that they were often involved in correcting situations that focused on civil rights. None of these events have been recorded in Oklahoma's history books.

Two days following that critical meeting, Davis was admitted to OSU. Unfortunately, she was not allowed to sit inside the classroom with the other students, who were all white. The *Jackson Sun* identified some states that enacted Jim Crow laws regarding teaching in Oklahoma:

Oklahoma Teaching: Any instructor who shall teach in any school, college or institution where members of the white and colored race are received and enrolled as pupils for instruction shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars (\$10.00) nor more than fifty dollars (\$50.00) for each offense.”<sup>19</sup>

Davis's seat was outside of the room in an anteroom, an office nook. Other students in the classroom expressed their resentment of this disparity and insisted that Davis be moved into the classroom. Under their pressure and with trepidation, instructors allowed her to move into the classroom with the other students. Oklahoma's law placed them in jeopardy of losing their teaching positions if discovered; therefore, students constantly watched for administrators who might happen to enter the area. Oklahoma was serious about keeping schools, businesses, recreation facilities, churches, and even cemeteries segregated.

Classmates' willingness to study with Davis, offer her transportation when completing class projects, and give her rides home when necessary allowed Davis to realize that she was among individuals who appreciated her, as well as her academic skills. As one of the top students in her class, she was often called on to perform class demonstrations. Because of her diligence and cooperative spirit, she was not subjected to the violence often described by victims of the segregation era. Since awarding Nancy Randolph Davis her master of science degree on July 25, 1952, OSU has honored Davis by naming a residence hall after her, awarding three scholarships in her name, and setting aside a special recognition day for her each February during Black History Month. Tandra Stevenson presents a brief overview of the awards Davis has received from the University in an OSU publication. Following Davis's recognition by the university, numerous organizations and public media showcased her accomplishments as a part of their



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

programs. An exhibit of her civil rights participation at OSU and with the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council is proudly displayed in the Oklahoma History Center near the Oklahoma State Capitol.<sup>20</sup>

From the university, Davis gleaned information that contributed to her continued teaching success in her high school classrooms. She referred to an OSU philosophy of home economics education professor who used the Biblical beatitudes from the fifth chapter of Matthew as a model for interacting with all students.<sup>21</sup> These characteristics taught by Jesus emphasize eight values that promise rewards for those individuals who are able to follow them. She incorporated these values into a philosophy that became a needed tool when she left Dunjee High School in 1968 and became one among other African American instructors who had previously been hired at the predominantly white Star Spencer High School.<sup>22</sup>

In the midst of numerous Oklahoma City black school closures, Dunjee School's future was also nearing its end in 1972.<sup>23</sup> Some of its student population had already been sent to Star Spencer High School. Davis numbered among the teachers who transferred from Dunjee to Star Spencer or to other Oklahoma City public schools. Facing racial issues at Star Spencer High School proved to be a mighty task for Nancy Davis, who felt that her greatest challenge had been in the OSU classroom. She now faced the task of teaching in a school that was approximately 75 percent Caucasian and 25 percent African American.<sup>24</sup> The statistics were not as daunting as the tense situation among the students and faculty. Davis had long been noted for her excellence in helping develop student leaders in home economics classes and clubs. These leaders often applied their leadership skills in various clubs to become officers for their classes and in extracurricular activities. Such was not the case at Star Spencer. White students and faculty overtly discriminated against African American students who joined different clubs. White members would neglect to tell them about certain events or activities so that they would not be included. One student who wanted to join the cheering squad trained especially hard and mastered the required steps; unfortunately, the judges ignored her efforts.<sup>25</sup>

A few of the concerned white students who noticed the inequities between the two racial groups shared their concerns with the black girls. In order to accomplish positive results, they would have needed adult support, which was not available at that time. Because of the hostile environment at Star Spencer, the new Dunjee transfer students were not selected as officers.

They experienced racism that was encouraged by the silence of their white sponsors. This was fertile ground for Davis to begin applying her

NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS



*In fall 1968 Davis became the home economics teacher at Star Spencer High School (photograph courtesy of Nancy Lynn Davis).*

talents as a human relations expert. She made it her business to have a conference with the principal regarding the situation, which had become rather tense among the student body and school personnel.<sup>26</sup>

Star Spencer Principal June Dawkins held leadership of Star Spencer from 1967–71. He is recognized in the school's history for his participation in the growth of the school.<sup>27</sup> Dawkins had a reputation for quelling dissidence within high schools where he had worked and preventing the media from publicizing or exaggerating school issues. The above incident and numerous others proved that Dawkins's approach produced satisfactory results to the school's tense environment. With the cooperation of several white and black teachers, including Davis, Dawkins helped the school transition from its hostile environment to one of grudging acceptance. The precarious peace did not last for long because the District Court issued an order in 1972 forcing the closure of Dunjee School. The remaining Dunjee students were then sent to Star Spencer.<sup>28</sup>

Students' fights were the order of the day.<sup>29</sup> Teachers faced segregated classrooms because students sat in areas with their own races.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Halls had to be monitored because of the open hostility as evidenced by the verbal and physical exchanges among the students. Many of the teachers did not help the situation as they tended to side with white students in wanting the black students to leave. To demonstrate their resentment of being forced to attend Star Spencer, the former Dunjee students would sit in the back of the auditorium during assembly programs. One type of negative action often witnessed happened during pep assemblies that rumbled with two school chants: "Star Spencer Bobcats!" and "Dunjee Tigers!" Students from Dunjee expressed their displeasure at being forced to attend another school and see their forty-two year old institution closed. Star Spencer students voiced their resentment of the Dunjee students' presence in their school.<sup>30</sup>

A Human Relations Club was definitely needed in such volatile situations. The perfect leader for such an organization was Nancy Randolph Davis, who selected a white teacher to assist her. Of course, progress was not instant. Even the Oklahoma City School Board interfered with the positive resolution of the Star Spencer situation. When the club prepared assembly programs, the board would send representatives to oversee the content of the presentations sponsored by Nancy Davis, Gloria Pollard, and Flossie Thurston.<sup>31</sup> During one black history practice, the board representatives felt that the student characters were critical of white Governor George Wallace of Alabama in one segment of their presentation and demanded that the section be removed from the program.<sup>32</sup>

Davis told of an incident where two black band students traveled with the band to a local university for a football game. After the game, the two students asked for and received permission to go to the restroom. While they were away, the sponsor took the rest of the band and left the campus, leaving the two students to get home on their own. Davis reported this action to the principal; this incident resulted in resignation of the band sponsor. For the most part, the principal's positive leadership, teachers whose focus was on student success, and students who wanted to learn contributed to the eventual calm of the school and its later recognition as an academic institution with excellent football and basketball programs. Names associated with Star Spencer's programs include: Carl Twidwell (football), Janet Johnson (girls' basketball), and Johnnie Johnson and David Smith (boys' basketball). These coaches, among others, worked with athletes who excelled in their various sports.<sup>33</sup> In spite of being overshadowed by sports, the academic program of the school boasted outstanding teachers and students.

While working hard to help maintain positive relations within the school, Davis found herself in a personal battle for upward mobility.

NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS



*Boarding the bus at Douglass High School, Oklahoma City, for the National NAACP Convention in Washington, DC. Left to right: A. Willie James, Clara Luper, bus driver, reporter, August 26, 1963 (20246.38.104.5, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).*

*Above: Bus at Douglass High School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, headed for the National NAACP Convention in Washington, DC. Left to right: Nancy Lynn Davis (daughter of Nancy Randolph Davis), Robert Dowell (202465.38.104.3, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Collection).*



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

She said that after many years of teaching home economics, she saw an opportunity to teach a newly created child care class on the Star Spencer campus. This class was designed to prepare juniors and seniors to work with preschool children and become candidates for internships at local child care centers. The white state supervisor wanted to give the position to a white woman who was unqualified. Along with her credentials and other application materials required, Davis procured her Health Certificate and delivered this vital document to the supervisor's office where it was conveniently misplaced.<sup>34</sup> Without this certificate, an application would be rejected. Fortunately, as with the situation at OSU, the intervention of two caring colleagues allowed her to locate the certificate and have it signed and delivered to the Health Department. With support from Star Spencer's first African American Principal, Dr. Leon Edd, she was hired for the position. Receiving numerous stares of resentment from white teachers at local and state meetings did not deter Davis from her objective—to teach young people the skill of child

*Nancy Davis (right) presenting an award to Clara Luper (photograph courtesy of Nancy Lynn Davis).*





Above: Civil rights sit-in at Bishop's Restaurant, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, c. 1960s. Left to right on floor: Linda Benson, Linda Pogue, Carolyn House, and Zella Hull. Standing left to right: Maurice Coffey, Dwayne Cosby, unknown person, unknown person, and Willie Ruth Jones (20246.38.84.6, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).

care.<sup>35</sup> In spite of such negative responses, she again demonstrated her natural talents as a leader and used her ability to develop an outstanding child care program that prepared numerous high school students for careers in child care. Following their graduation, some of the students in Davis's classes opened their own child care businesses.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the previously described events that molded Davis into the icon that she had become, the one event that transformed her most in her relationships with others was her involvement with Clara S. Luper, which began when the two ladies worked together at Dunjee. Luper wrote a play entitled *Brother President*, the story of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The play was such an impressive production that NAACP representatives requested its presentation for their 1957 New York City convention.<sup>37</sup> In her book, Clara Luper gives a detailed description of the events surrounding the play and the students involved in its presentations in Oklahoma City and in New York City. In order

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Above and below: Sit-in at lunch counter in Katz Drug Store, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 26, 1958 (20246-38-395-B. John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).*



to promote the performance, Luper enlisted the help of Davis in working with some of the Dunjee students and a group of young people from Oklahoma City. Most of these youngsters would eventually form the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council. In 1958 a few of them would become some of the first “sit-inners” in downtown Oklahoma City.<sup>38</sup> Davis discovered that the difficult task of cosponsorship included regular meetings and extensive fundraising. The position required invading her family life, which she mastered by involving her two children in the Youth Council. Not only did they participate in the sit-ins, but they also became officers in local and national NAACP Youth Councils. This experience pointed them in the direction of the legal profession which both children entered after their graduation from college.<sup>39</sup>

Preparing the young people for the Oklahoma City sit-ins proved a worthy challenge for Luper and Davis. Although many parents allowed their children to be placed under the tutelage of these educational professionals, many others did not. Parents expressed concern over impending conflicts associated with going against the status quo of segregation; however, working with the groups of children who gathered each week in Luper’s home and later at the Calvary Baptist Church, the adults formulated sit-in plans. Luper laid out five criteria for the process:

- (1) going directly to the site; (2) not looking back; (3) going as far as we could and sit on the floor; (4) maintain complete silence; and (5) don’t move, maintain complete self control. “If they beat you, take it. If they kick you, take it. If they lift you up and drag you to jail, take it. If they spit on you, take it.”<sup>40</sup>

For the most part, the formula worked. Unfortunately, Davis probably reached her breaking point after the actual sit-ins began. Luper initially informed Davis that her temper was too short and posed a threat to their peace effort.<sup>41</sup> Luper asked Davis to remain at the church to help with organization. At a later time, Luper relented and allowed Davis to go to John A. Brown’s and H. L. Green’s for one of the protests.<sup>42</sup> In hindsight, Luper should have maintained her stand on Davis’ participation in the activity. While standing with the children, Davis saw a white lady attack and curse one of the children in her presence. Just as she was about to retaliate, Luper stepped up and grabbed her while reminding her that the demonstration was to be peaceful. Naturally, that ended the onsite work by Davis, who was again relegated organizing the young people at the meeting place rather than joining them in their peaceful efforts.



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Civil rights sit-in at the John A. Brown Department Store.*

*Above, left to right: Carolyn House, Brenda Officer, Paul Anderson, unknown person (20246.38.410.5, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).*

*Below, left to right: Barbara Posey, Linda Pogue, unknown person, Arnetta Carmichael, and unknown person behind the counter (20246.38.410.7, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).*



NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

Davis related that unexpected responses to the new Youth Council's actions included bombing of the Freedom Center Learning Center which was the location of the Youth Council's meetings and various activities.<sup>43</sup> The building was burned three times, enough to daunt the spirits of the adults. Fortunately, the youth were not as easily put off by such actions. After being encouraged to pray, the youth leader, Harold Woodson, exhibited determination that spread among the other young people who rebuilt the center. They managed to remove destroyed furniture, learning materials used by mentors and tutors, kitchen utensils, and other damaged items. Without the aid of any professional construction removal companies, the young people and their sponsors—Luper, Davis, and other adults—managed to clear the rubble in three months.<sup>44</sup>

After their major civil rights accomplishments in Oklahoma City, Luper and the Youth Council decided to march to Lawton, Oklahoma,

*Civil rights leaders at the Oklahoma City Police Headquarters. Left to right: Mrs. Ella Floyd, Ed Stamps, police chief, Mrs. Freddie Moon Bobbye, Clara Luper, unknown, Father Robert McDole, A. Willie James, and E. Melvin Porter (20246.38.282.3, John Melton Collection, OHS Research Division).*



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

in an effort to attack the segregation walls erected at Doe Doe Recreation Park.<sup>45</sup> Davis said that the group walked from Oklahoma City to Lawton on a hot 1966 summer day. Davis's assignment was in keeping with her discipline: she and her husband prepared food and drinks to keep the walkers strengthened and motivated. Supporters who were unable to make the march contributed food to help the group. No matter what the occasion, Davis always filled in the gaps with her cooking skills. If she did not prepare it herself, she supervised the preparation and presentation of the needed fare. Her four year old son was the youngest of the group of children to participate in the trek to Lawton. Arriving at their destination, the Oklahoma City team was met by citizens of the city and greeted warmly by the hosts who joined them in the march. Although the desired results were not achieved until about two years after the march, Lawton experienced slow progress between the 1966 march and the park's desegregation in 1968. Davis felt a sense of pride when she spoke of Oklahoma City's youth and adults participating in that historic event.<sup>46</sup>

From the time that she refused to be denied entrance into Oklahoma State University's Graduate Program to the present, Nancy Randolph Davis has become a recognized icon in Oklahoma's education, civil rights, political and community landscapes. Various entities and individuals have influenced her life and experiences. Included among those persons is the late Reverend H. A. Walker, her pastor and friend. Davis has always attributed her accomplishments to her family, her faith, and her friends.

One organization that exhibits the closeness Davis has maintained with her students is the Dunjee All School Reunion.<sup>47</sup> This group consists of Dunjee classes from 1935, the school's opening, to 1972, its mandatory closing as a result of desegregation. It also includes descendants of students who attended the school. The organization meets every two years in Oklahoma City and Spencer. It offers scholarships to descendants of Dunjee alumni. Davis is one of the main former teachers to be actively involved in its functions, one of which includes the reunion. Anyone who has ever attended Dunjee is welcomed into the membership. Whenever a death has occurred among the student body family, Davis has volunteered to prepare written tributes or resolutions. After being faced with health issues, she passed the task on to her former students, who continue to faithfully carry on the task.<sup>48</sup>

Davis's prolific professional life has not been without challenges to her personal and physical life. In 1983, as she made preparations to travel to San Francisco for her daughter to receive her juris doctorate degree, Davis's mother-in-law passed away the day of her departure.

Following the bittersweet period, she returned home from the graduation for the funeral. Experiencing extreme abdominal discomfort, she went to her physician for tests. When the results showed lymphoma, the family was devastated, anticipating certain death. As a woman of strong faith, Davis turned to prayer and the support of her pastor and church, True Vine Baptist. Six months of chemotherapy and refusal to give up resulted in a healed Nancy Davis. Eight years later, in 1991, she fought another attack of cancer and won again.

On October 12, 2004, a near fatal accident occurred that left Davis pinned in her car and necessitated rescue by the jaws of life. The entire community of citizens, schools, churches, and businesses stood in the gap for her with constant prayers, visits, gifts and flowers. The prognosis was that she would never walk again because of the damage done to her recent knee replacements and a broken femur. The congregation of her church was surprised when Davis walked in the following year using a cane. The huge company of parishioners rose to greet her with thunderous applause. Her sharp mind continues to focus on the needs of her community and matters of human relations with which she is concerned.

Not a forgotten trailblazer, Nancy Davis is constantly recognized for her contributions toward building a better citizenry. In addition to naming a dorm building and three scholarships in her honor, OSU's College of Human Environmental Sciences has placed its brand on Davis for "Enhancing Human Lives."<sup>49</sup> The Dunjee School Reunion Class of 1954 recognized her as the outstanding educator, civil rights leader, and advisor who has constantly represented them.<sup>50</sup> Langston University's Class of 1948 presented her a certificate of appreciation because of her thirty years of service with the university as one of the founders and president of the Home Economics Alumni Association.<sup>51</sup> Blue Cross and Blue Shield gave her the Ageless Hero Award in 1999. This same year the late Oklahoma State Representative Opio Toure honored her with the Trail Blazer Award from the Black Caucus for being the first black enrollee at OSU. Nancy Davis and Rubye Hall were featured on the first page of the *Daily Oklahoman* as integration pioneers in Higher Education in the publication's *First 50 Years Celebration*.<sup>52</sup> The Oklahoma Human Rights Commission recognized her as an educator and trail blazer in the state of Oklahoma in 2008. She has been placed in the Oklahoma African American Hall of Fame.<sup>53</sup> Numerous churches, sororities, civic organizations, and groups have vied for opportunities to express their gratitude for her services to them. Chief among the churches awarding honors to Nancy Davis is her own church because of her service on the usher board, as a Sunday School teacher, and the

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Nancy Randolph Davis addresses a crowd celebrating her achievements at Oklahoma State University on February 1, 2006 (photo by Zack Tarrant, courtesy of the Daily O'Collegian, February 2, 2006).*

numerous roles she has played in modeling positive citizenship for the young people in the church.<sup>54</sup> The Miss Black Oklahoma Pageant and Soul Bazaar benefitted greatly from leadership by Nancy Davis, Clara Luper, and others.<sup>55</sup> The one organization, local and national, that appears to out-distance all others is Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. of which Nancy is a lifetime member. This sisterhood has embraced her and raised her to highest heights in its support of her leadership and participation.<sup>56</sup>

The beauty of Nancy Davis lies in her persistence: if she wants someone to perform a task that she deems important and beneficial, she gently nudges that individual until the task is completed. Davis's method of getting things done her way has encouraged all who have experienced her teaching methods to appreciate her. Anyone who has had an opportunity to know her has passed much of her philosophy on to others in families and communities inside and outside of Oklahoma and the United States. At her 1991 retirement celebration, Davis commented on her Christian and community involvement. Excerpts from one of her speeches serve as an appropriate closing for this historical sketch:

NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

My faith in God has sustained me thus far and will lead me to the hereafter. I am thankful for a spirit-filled church and ministers who are led by God. In addition, I believe that God has enabled me to do His work as I serve in community organizations that render a service to society. I love my sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. My family and I have labored through the years in the Civil Rights Struggle by working in the NAACP. My years of membership in the Amigos Club have been exceedingly gratifying as my Amigos Club sisters have been just like real sisters. The Plant and Garden Club of Spencer provides the inspiration I need to serve the community in which I live. Further, I have been blessed to have acquired through the years good neighbors with whom I have developed true friendship.<sup>57</sup>

This brief document is a celebration of one of those models. Nancy Davis used principles from the prayer of Jabez in Chronicles 4:10 as he requested God to bless him, enlarge his territory, keep His hand on him, keep him from evil, and not cause others pain. Those who know her often think of these requests in light of the impact Nancy Randolph Davis has had on individual lives, as well as on the lives of organizations in the community, the state, the country, and beyond.

*Nancy Randolph Davis (front row, far left) with members of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council (photograph courtesy of Nancy Lynn Davis).*



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

At this writing, Mrs. Davis has slowed her pace but continues to be an unstoppable force. When possible, she continues to attend church services and work with her sorority, participate in her favorite organizations, and visit with community members who suffer loss or need encouragement. Although she does not drive and has limited mobility, she has her children, close friends, former students, church members, and caregivers who gladly take her to whatever her destination might be. When she is unable to perform her many caring acts, she uses the telephone to delegate individuals suited to carry out her desires. In March 2012 Nancy Davis entered a rehabilitation center to help with her walking. Undaunted, she continues to remain upbeat and persistent in her efforts to help improve human relations and support the civil rights of all individuals.

### Endnotes

\* Gloria J. Pollard graduate from Dunjee Junior/Senior High School and taught at the school for one year. She spent seventeen years teaching English and French at Star Spencer High School. After this experience, she obtained her doctoral degree from the University of Oklahoma and worked with at-risk high school students for several years. She retired from the Oklahoma State Department of Career and Technology Education Guidance Division in 2008 and currently volunteers with the Millwood Enrichment Foundation and Respect Diversity Foundation.

Dr. Pollard explained her desire to write this story. "At this writing, Nancy Ola Randolph Davis waits patiently for her story to be shared with those who appreciate contributors to Oklahoma's history and those who helped form it. When Nancy Randolph married Fred C. Davis in 1953, she moved into his home, which was located directly behind my family's home. Mr. Davis's mother had watched me and my siblings grow up. Later, when the Davis children came along, we watched them grow and mature into professionals who also possessed a passion for human rights. In addition to being neighbors, Mrs. Davis was one of the sponsors for my Dunjee High School class in tenth and eleventh grades. Her sponsorship extended from the school to the community. Although those years are long past for both of us, she continues to use her retirement status to delicately dictate her desires to her former students and neighbors. Thus, when she said to me, 'I want you to tell my story,' I had no choice but to comply. Information and events presented in this article are excerpts from her full story, which she has given in a separate document.

"Based on conversations with Nancy Davis over a period of several years, I wrote this article in an effort to get an overview of some of her civil rights activities. During one of our conversations in 2007, Davis shared an overarching statement about her experiences in the struggle for civil and human rights: 'One of the most rewarding aspects of my involvement with Oklahoma's Civil Rights Movement is knowing that my children understand the importance of human rights. Whether support is coming from my parents, my peers, my children, or my fellow human rights supporters, I am indebted to those who recognize and respond to the call for freedom.'"

<sup>1</sup> Clara S. Luper (1923 - 2011) was recognized as the "Mother of Oklahoma's Civil Rights Movement." She led the sit-in demonstrations conducted in Oklahoma City in 1958. Her accomplishments are recorded in Oklahoma's history recognizing her as one of its outstanding citizens. Some of these works include George Henderson, *Race and the*

## NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

*University* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2010); Rochelle Stephey-Roberson, *Impact: Blacks in Oklahoma History* (Oklahoma City: Forty-Sixth Star Press, 2011); Oklahoma Public Radio/KOSU, "Voices of Oklahoma [sound recording], 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The exhibit of Nancy Randolph Davis is located in Oklahoma City's Capitol Complex area, in the Oklahoma History Center's African American exhibit in the Kerr-McGee Gallery on the third floor.

<sup>3</sup> *Oklahoma State University: News and Communications* (Stillwater, OK), Feb. 22, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> "Dunjee Junior Senior High School History," *Dunjee Tigers Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (April 2012): 2.

<sup>5</sup> Pam Merrill, "Edmond Public Schools," [www.okcss.org/Jim%20Crow%20in%20Oklahoma.ppt](http://www.okcss.org/Jim%20Crow%20in%20Oklahoma.ppt), accessed September 4, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Woods, *Mises Daily*, "The Forgotten Depression of 1920," November 27, 2009. The Depression of 1920-1921 in the United States represented a time when the stock market crashed, banks closed, businesses declined, people lost jobs, and the economy failed.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Paul Johnson, "WPA Historical Records Survey," [http://www.interment.net/column/records/wpa/wpa\\_history.htm](http://www.interment.net/column/records/wpa/wpa_history.htm), accessed July 28, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Randolph Davis, "Evidences of Application of the Teaching of Home Improvement in the Homes of Sixty High School Girls, Choctaw, Oklahoma" (master's thesis, Oklahoma A&M University, 1952).

<sup>9</sup> Zella Black Patterson, *Langston University: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Davis, interview with the author, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> JoAnn W. Haysbert, *Greatness: A Presidential Report on Langston University's Progress Toward Greatness*, Spring 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Hilton Kelly, *Race, Remembering and Jim Crow's Teachers* (New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Dunjee All School Reunion Souvenir Booklet, 2012, private collection of the author.

<sup>14</sup> The Proud '85 was the name of Dunjee's marching band that consisted of 85 students; Geneva Smith wrote both the alma mater and fight song for Dunjee School, *Dunjee Tigers Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (April 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, *Race, Remembering and Jim Crow Teachers*, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Lackmeyer, "OKC History's Attic," *Oklahoman*, April 25, 2009, [www.okchistory.com](http://www.okchistory.com); Hannah D. Atkins, "Amos T. Hall," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/H/HA006.html>, accessed October 27, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> "October 1960: The Untold Story of Jackson's Civil Rights Movement," *Jackson Sun*, [orig.jacksonsun.com/civilrights/sec1\\_crow\\_laws.shtml](http://orig.jacksonsun.com/civilrights/sec1_crow_laws.shtml), accessed October 27, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Tamba Stevenson, "First black student honored by OSU," *Daily O'Collegian* (Stillwater, OK), April 15, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 5:1-12.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy R. Davis, interview with the author, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> United States Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit, "Finger Plan of 1972-73," added November 4, 1993, <http://law.justia.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> "Star Spencer High School," <http://okcps.starspencerhs.schooldesk.net/Home/tabid/1333/Default.aspx>, October 26, 2012.



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

<sup>28</sup> Dunjee School closed in 1972 and its students were ordered to attend Star Spencer school, US Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit, “Finger Plan of 1972-73.”

<sup>29</sup> Personal recollections of the author.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Flossie Thurston, Nancy Davis, and Gloria Pollard were all teachers at the school during this period.

<sup>32</sup> Alabama Department of Archives and History, “Governor George Wallace of Alabama (1963-1967, 1971-1975, 1975-1979, 1983-1987),” [http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs\\_list/g\\_wallac.html](http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/g_wallac.html); Nancy Davis, interview with the author, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> “Star Spencer Reflects on History,” *Bobcat Banner...xTra: 50 Years*, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Following his position at Star Spencer, Dr. Edd moved on to become superintendent of Millwood Independent School District.

<sup>36</sup> Many of those students who opened their personal daycare centers entered post-secondary programs for additional training in conducting business.

<sup>37</sup> Clara Luper, *Behold The Walls* (Oklahoma City: Jim Wire, 1979).

<sup>38</sup> In addition to wide media coverage, the Oklahoma History Center and the state’s history books contain details of the event that led to the desegregation of numerous businesses in Oklahoma City. The NAACP Youth Council later joined forces with a group in Lawton, Oklahoma, to help with their fight to integrate Doe Doe Park.

<sup>39</sup> Davis’s two children later earned law degrees following their graduations from high school and college.

<sup>40</sup> Luper, *Behold the Walls*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Oklahoma City’s civil rights protests targeted John A. Brown, a major department store, and H. L. Green’s, a variety store, along with other stores in downtown Oklahoma City. Katz Drug Store is the noted site of some of the sit-in demonstrations.

<sup>43</sup> Luper gives details of this bombing in *Behold the Walls*. Local and national newspapers covered the stories that described the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council’s dedication to freedom.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> NAACP Youth Council felt it was their duty to help another city that was experiencing the same discrimination they experienced.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Davis interview, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> “Tiger Pride Continues,” *Dunjee: All School Reunion 1935 – 2012*, program booklet, personal collection of the author.

<sup>48</sup> Personal recollection of the author.

<sup>49</sup> OSU Homecoming Souvenir Booklet, *Human Environmental Sciences*, 2009; OSU and Oklahoma State Department of Career Tech place their “brand,” a term harkening back to ranching days, on special individuals who have played an important part in their institutions. The “brand” is given in the form of a framed certificate.

<sup>50</sup> The plaque for this honor was presented by the Class of 1954 during the 1998 Dunjee School Reunion.

<sup>51</sup> This honor was bestowed during Langston University’s 1998 Golden Anniversary.

<sup>52</sup> *Oklahoman*, May 22, 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Oklahoma African American Hall of Fame, NTU Art Association of Oklahoma, Inc., conferred this honor upon Nancy Davis on June 12, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Davis’s membership has been with the True Vine Ministries located in Spencer, Oklahoma for more than sixty years. She often refers to the first pastor, the late Reverend H. A. Walker, his successor, Pastor Emeritus F. L. Wilson, and her current pastor, Reverend C. Lubin. Her dedication to the church has never faltered. True Vine honored her during its February 2007 black history program. The church has recognized her accomplishments throughout the years.

## NANCY O. RANDOLPH DAVIS

<sup>55</sup> Before her retirement, and some years following, Davis, along with sponsor Clara Luper, served as a staff member of the Miss Black Oklahoma Pageant.

<sup>56</sup> Davis has been designated as a Golden Soror within the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

<sup>57</sup> Retirement speech by Nancy Davis, 1991.