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William McKinley Jackson
from
*Essence of a People:
African Americans Who Made a
Difference in Loudoun County , Virginia*

“A force to be reckoned with in his tireless efforts to improve race relations.” “An advocate of the best education for all, believing that there is not equality in separation.” “Insistent on the principles of equality for every man, woman and child, regardless of race, color, or creed” this is how those who knew William Jackson wrote of him.

From a beginning as a stonemason with a fourth-grade education, Jackson rose to become a successful building contractor and president of the Loudoun County branch of the NAACP.

Jackson was involved with the County-Wife League’s early efforts to achieve equal schooling for black children. One action involved his daughter. He and his wife, Mildred Grisby Jackson, had sent her to the Manassas Industrial School , a boarding facility, because she could not attend high school in Loudoun County . At the advice of the prominent black lawyer, Charles Houston, he presented a bill to the Loudoun County School Board for the costs that he incurred having to send his daughter to a boarding school. Action on his request was postponed; however, the point was made.

In 1962, as president of the NAACP, he was involved in bringing suit against the school board to integrate the schools. Twelve black students had asked to be admitted to white high school; only four were admitted. The NAACP went to court on behalf of the other eight. The Federal District Court in Alexandria ruled the following year that the Loudoun School Board must implement the “freedom of choice plan designed to phase out the all-Negro school as well as to integrate the white schools.” Five years later, 811 out of a total of 1,403 black students were still in all-black schools. Jackson worked with the Department of Justice to get the School Board to comply. In the summer of 1967, the NAACP was back in Court. This time the order of the Court was obeyed. In addition, the transportation of students was desegregated.

Jackson and the NAACP also worked for integration in other areas. In 1961, when approached by Howard University students who had been denied service in a Middleburg drugstore, Jackson arranged for a meeting with leaders of both civic and religious groups at which a settlement was negotiated. He also led efforts to integrate public places in Middleburg such as the swimming pool, the community center, and the library. Jackson was not always successful, however. The victory in a court action to desegregate the Firemen’s swimming pool in Leesburg was thwarted when the



fireman closed the pool. A Middleburg citizen remembers, “Mr. Jackson took in stride the many setbacks which he faced in his fight of equality. He was not turned back by simple defeats, but kept his battle on-going to overcome these adversities.”

“Mr. Willie,” as he was known to his friends, would “speak his mind to any race but always with his words seasoned with sugar.” He was serious. He was also very convincing; he desegregated the Middleburg Community Center on the occasion of the 25 th Anniversary of the Loudoun County NAACP by simply stating very directly the case for the NAACP’s using the facility. Certainly his bearing was a factor. He was an imposing individual. “When he was dressed for his Sunday morning service, he would walk like a soldier.” And woe be it to the individual who did not appreciate Jackson ’s insistence on punctuality. There is the story of the minister whom Jackson had engaged as a guest preacher at this church, Shiloh Baptist. The minister arrived late. Deacon Jackson greeted him and said, “You will have to come another time. The service is over!”

In addition to his long service with the NAACP, Jackson was active in his church. He served as Chairman of the Deacon Board, and on the Board of the Solon Cemetery , was a charter member of Head Start, and a member of the Odd Fellows. Jackson was born in Mountville. His parents were John and Mary Bell Jackson.

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