



# "NEWSLETTER"

## CABHAA



### General Information

#### *Citadel of trauma: The untold story of The Citadel's first Black graduate—Charles DeLesline Foster An Overlooked Trailblazer*

Charles Foster was just a seventeen year old Black kid who wanted a college education when he joined The Citadel Corps of Cadets in 1966, says his brother Bill Foster. What he got was a lesson in humility and a place in the history books as the corps' first Black graduate. "Those four years made him a completely different person—no doubt about it. Charles was intense after he graduated. You could really tell when he talked, especially when he was making a point. His demeanor had changed. I'm sure something happened and it was so traumatic... he refused to talk about it." Unlike the four women who broke the gender barrier at the 153 year old military college in 1996, Foster carried his burden alone. When the female pioneers entered The Citadel, the world watched. Foster's arrival thirty years before stirred barely a ripple beyond The Citadel's iron gates. People didn't want him there, but accompanied by his brother and mother on his first day, they treated him as any other plebe coming into the system, however, you could tell feelings were hidden. That kind of ambiguity may have been the hallmark of Charles Foster's four years at The Citadel. Even today, thirty years after he broke the corps' color barrier and ten years after he died in a Texas house fire, questions remain not only about the facts of Foster's Citadel years, but about his place in history, too. "For The Citadel, Charles Foster was the wrong Black guy to be the first, just like Shannon Faulkner was the wrong first women." From the beginning of his Citadel experience, Charles Foster drew little attention. The great desegregation stories had already been written: James Meredith had already integrated the University of Mississippi; Harvey Gantt of North Charleston had broken the color line at Clemson. Nor were Black students unprecedented at The Citadel. Even before Foster arrived, Blacks had attended summer school at the college. But no Black man had ever been a part of the Corps of Cadets, endured the fourth-class system, or worn the ring. The college asked the media not to make a big fuss about Foster's arrival on campus. Reporters agreed to rules designed not to single out Foster. The national media filed low-key stories, then left. A short story about Foster's arrival, battalion assignment, and roommate appeared in *The Charleston, S. C. News and Courier*. During Foster's four years at The Citadel, only two stories, one column and one editorial were written about him locally. The story about the 1970 graduation had one paragraph about the first Black graduate. This lack of public attention meant that Foster's experience went virtually unexamined for thirty years. Name-calling was common. Cadets yelled out windows to camouflage the source of the insults. And the abuse didn't end with his knob (freshman) year. Whatever punishment other cadets received, it was worse for Foster because he was Black. Upperclassman pressured his classmates to pressure Charlie to quit. In most cases plebes band together. But in this particular situation, it didn't happen for Charlie. Foster was a tough kid and as one cadet put it: I never heard a kid called nigger more in my entire life. During "roving mess," when the athletes ate with other cadets, freshmen were forced out of their usual seats and had to find another place to eat. It was obvious when Charles was looking for a seat because the chant "rigger, rigger" was heard. According to his brother, Charles received threatening letters, got the silent treatment, and had several brushes with roommates. Foster survived, but his success was relative. A former honors student at Charles A. Brown High School, his grades at The Citadel were undistinguished. His weight increased by thirty pounds and he never rose above the rank of private. Charles Foster celebrated his graduation in May 1970, then left Charleston and never moved back. He was commissioned an Army lieutenant and spent three years as an explosives expert, most of it at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. He never went to Vietnam, and settled in Dallas after leaving the Army in 1973. But success eluded him. Near the end of his life, Foster was a moving company manager struggling to pay his bills. A burglary conviction in 1985 led to a four month stay in a Texas state prison. He never married and had no children. Charles died with two other men in a house fire on March 29, 1986, outside Dallas. Despite Charles Foster's role in The Citadel history, no scholarship or building bears his name. There is no mural and no bust. The school's tribute to him is an eight inch by ten inch black and white reprint of his senior picture with an inscription displayed in the third floor museum of the Daniel Library. It was unveiled, as a posthumous honor, in 1992. "I don't think Charles received the recognition he deserves," his brother Bill Foster said. "He was a trail blazer, and they always get the shaft." It took The Citadel twenty-two years to recognize him for his achievement. "The Citadel was Charles toughest challenge," Bill Foster said. "He won, but never got the prize or the recognition. But he's still a Citadel man"

## Upcoming & Past Events

We will hold election of officers at our December 8, 2009 Alumni meeting. All persons interested in holding an office, please be present and up to date with your dues. It is our wish that each of you who attended the past Gala Affairs will become a member of the Alumni Association (CABHAA). To do so, we will need the following: name, address, phone number, e-mail address, \$25.00 Alumni dues and the year you attended or taught at C. A. Brown High. Upon receiving this information, we will send you a CABHAA calendar or CABHAA license plate. Please print legible on your form.

Our Christmas Gala will be held the weekend of December 17-19, 2010. More information will be forth coming.

The Alumni Association made their quarterly church visitation at Memorial Missionary Baptist Church in June.

C. A. Brown Class of 1975 will hold its initial meeting for their 35 Year Reunion on Thursday September 10, 2009 from 7-8:00pm at the Main Library on Calhoun Street.

The class of 1971 will hold its annual crab crack on Friday September 18, 2009 at Washington Park Community Center.

The Alumni Association Oyster Roast/Costume Party will be held on Friday October 30, 2009 at Washington Park Community Center.

The Alumni Association held a raffle on May 5, 2009 and the winners are as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of \$150.00 Shauna Grant, 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner of \$100.00 Randall Green and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winner of \$50.00 Roshanda Grant.

The Association is asking for donations to help with the following: Thanksgiving baskets to needed families and Food to the Ronald McDonald House for children with chronic illness. Baskets will be delivered on 11/21/09. All donations are asked to be in by 11/6/09. Please feel free to contact us by calling 843-437-0183.

## Prayer Line

Let us keep Karyn Hart (79) and Ruth Rouse (70) in our prayers as they face challenging days ahead.

Let's keep all of our classmates and their families in prayer.

## Congratulations

Debbie Meyers-Mathews (71) recently received her BS in Business Management (Summa Cum Laude) from DeVry University on 3/1/2009.

Rev. Yvonne Bonaparte-Simmons (67) received her Master of Divinity, Erskine Theological Seminary Due West, S. C. 5/16/2009.

Stacey Gathers, daughter of Richard Gathers (66) graduated on August 9, 2009 from Southern Illinois University with a B.S. in Exercise Physiology.

Robert Crawford, Jr., son of Robert Crawford, Sr. (71) graduated from Clark University in Atlanta, Ga. in May 2009.

The Honorable James Clyburn (Teacher) was honored for his work on BET.

## Got An Idea?

Send us your ideas, suggestions, birthdays, anniversaries, or items of interest so that we can include them in the upcoming Newsletter.

P. O. Box 532  
Ladson, S. C. 29456  
(843) 437-0183

All classes with upcoming events please e-mail your information to anyone of the Alumni officers to be place in our next August Newsletter.

## Memorials

Mr. George Stanyard entered into eternal rest on February 18, 2009.

Terrell Simmons son Marcus passed away on July 27, 2009. Terrell is the nephew of the late Joan Chisolm (70).

Herbert Kirkland, brother of Jimmy Kirkland (71), passed away on August 1, 2009.

Mr. Richard Marshall Husband of Mrs. Joan Marshall (Teacher) passed away.

Mr. George Kenny, Sr., father of Mr. George Kenny (Teacher) passed away.

Lawrence Gaillard, brother of Mary Gaillard Heyward (71) passed away August 1, 2009.

Mrs. Maggie Livingston, mother of Dorothy Smith (75), passed away.

Elese Simmons Coaxum passed away.

Bernadette Brown (80) passed away.

## Alumni Officers

Joseph T. Washington (Joey), President (80)

[jtwashington@aol.com](mailto:jtwashington@aol.com)

Birthdate: 1/1

Sharon Coakley, Vice-President (70)

[slc9@meadinvestco.com](mailto:slc9@meadinvestco.com)

Birthdate: 2/10

Karyn Hart, Secretary (79)

Birthdate: 8/10

Joleitha Solomon, Assistant Secretary (80)

Birthdate: 4/5

Virgie Bryant-Green, Treasurer (71)

Birthdate: 2/6

Richard Gathers, Assistant Treasurer (66)

Birthdate: 4/20

Vanessa Hamilton, Public Relations (81)

Birthdate: 1/26

Theodora Watson, BMC Chairperson (71)

Birthdate: 5/13

Ruth G. Coleman, BMC CO-Chairperson (71)

Birthdate: 3/15

Nathaniel McKnight, BMC (67)

Birthdate: 8/6

Vanessa Goodwin, BMC (75)

Birthdate: 10/18

Robert Crawford, Sr. Chaplin (71)

Birthdate: 2/20

**Publication of Newsletters are done twice a year, July & December**