



Lincoln School Marchers carry signs while walking to Webster Elementary in Hillsboro, Ohio in the mid 1950s. Photo by Getty Images

MARCHING ON

After *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided in 1954, a group of Black mothers in Southwest Ohio dressed up their children and marched them to the white school, demanding admission. Upon being rejected, they woke up the next morning and marched again. And again. And again. For two years, they marched. Even their eventual win came at a cost. Theirs is a story of pain. Of passion. Of determination. And of love.

Story By Aaron Rovin

and Melvin Barnes

Photos By Shellee Fisher

A thunderclap roused Dana Fields from a deep sleep. It was the middle of the night, but an acrid stench permeated the air. As a lightning flash cast shadows through the room, he heard a frantic commotion in the kitchen. The 5-year-old boy wandered from his bed to find his parents.

“No,” his dad said. “It’s not here.”

“I know I smell smoke,” his mom insisted.

A sudden spark drew the family’s attention outside. Ten-foot flames licked the darkness as they engulfed the windows of Lincoln Elementary—the school and social hub for the small town’s vibrant Black community. A lightning streak threw the rest of the building into grotesque relief. As the ensuing thunder rumbled through Hillsboro—a small town tucked into the Appalachian foothills of southwest Ohio—Dana stood, entranced.

Perhaps the man who set the building aflame was running. Or maybe he was watching it burn from a nearby hilltop perch he had escaped to.

Regardless, he was already gone.

When Hillsboro residents awoke on July 5, 1954, the summer storm had passed, but the damage to Lincoln Elementary was permanent. Gossip skittered through the small town. Who had set the fire? For what reason? And, most importantly, where would the young Black students go to school in the fall?

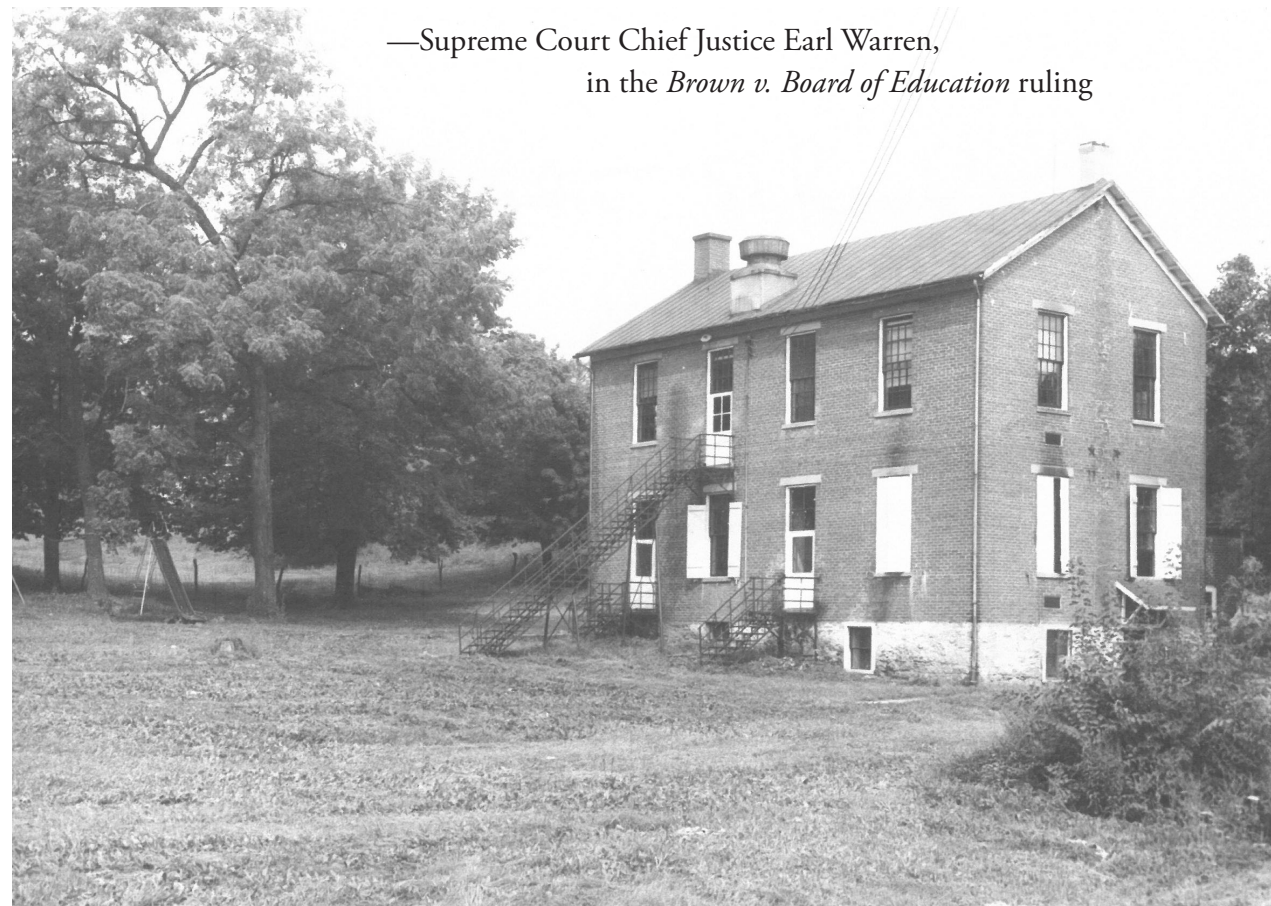
For a select few in town, the answer to the latter question was simple: the schools would be integrated.

Just six weeks earlier, the nation had held its collective breath as Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren took the center chair in the nation’s highest courtroom. America’s system of racial segregation hung in the balance as he prepared to read the Court’s unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. “Separate but equal,” he read, “has no place in the Constitution.”

School segregation was now, in theory, illegal. But as the Black community in Hillsboro knew, theory and practice are two dramatically different things.

“*Separate but equal has no place in the Constitution.*”

—Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren,
in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling



Lincoln Elementary School in Hillsboro, Ohio, was built in 1864. It served as the primary school for local Black children and doubled as a social hub for the Black community. **Image Courtesy Highland County Historical Society**

The *Brown* decision changed everything and nothing, said Dr. Jessica Viñas-Nelson, a professor of African American History at Arizona State University and an expert on desegregation.

“The *Brown* decision is this thunderclap,” she said, especially in terms of legal precedent. But lived experiences of people in the mid-1950s, she noted, were far less dramatic. “*Brown* did not fix anything. You had a slow walk all across the country to end school segregation. And it was almost harder to dislodge in the North.”

Hillsboro was one of those Northern towns where officials approached integration cautiously after the Supreme Court decision. Although the community’s high schools were integrated by 1946, the elementary schools were still racially segregated. Black students attended Lincoln, and white students went to Webster and Washington. After the *Brown* decision, the school board announced that they would integrate the elementary schools only after they were finished remodeling the Washington school building, which they projected would take two years.

That kind of stalling tactic was typical in the months and years immediately following the decision, thanks to vague language around the enforcement of integration. “The Court said you should desegregate ‘with all deliberate speed,’” Viñas-Nelson said. “And that was interpreted by opponents of *Brown* in a very liberal sense.”

Although Hillsboro’s school officials were comfortable delaying integration, the Highland County engineer—a white man who believed segregation was wrong—was furious about the injustice. The week before the fire, Philip Partridge listened to his Presbyterian minister preach in defense of

those who break the law in pursuit of just reforms. Partridge considered his options. If there is no school for Black children to attend, he surmised, then the white schools *must* allow the Black children in.

He acted in the early morning hours of July 5. This, he believed, was an act of patriotism. As little Dana Fields and his family slept soundly across the street, Partridge clawed through the weeds of an abandoned alley up to the isolated school. Wielding a crowbar, he broke the padlock of Lincoln Elementary, doused newspapers in oil and gasoline and struck a match.

Partridge was eventually found guilty of arson and served nine months in prison. But he always defended his actions as justified. “We can’t wait five or 10 or 20 years for progress,” Partridge later wrote for the *Cleveland Call and Post*, a Black newspaper. “We may not be a free nation that long.”

Partridge, it turns out, had ignited not just a structure but also a movement that would eventually place this quiet, rural town at the epicenter of the battle to desegregate schools nationwide.

Sunlight dappled Joyce Clemons’ face as she hid behind the tree in her front yard. Like many young girls, Joyce was curious, particularly about the conversations among adults. On that day near the end of July in 1954, Joyce was eavesdropping on her mom as she talked with their neighbor, Miss Imogene, over the fence. The tree’s rough bark rubbed uncomfortably under Joyce’s palms as she steadied herself to peek across the yard. As the mothers hung laundry, Joyce caught snippets of their conversation.

IGNITING A MOVEMENT

After his arrest for setting Lincoln Elementary on fire, Philip Partridge wrote a column for the *Cleveland Call and Post* published on October 16, 1954, excerpted here.

I thought of the many things that needed to be done in the world and how little I had done. I thought about the school problem in Hillsboro and our comfortable home and yard and me sitting in a rocking chair year after year waiting for death and the problem going on and on. I thought of my four years here during which time I had hoped that desegregation in our organization was accomplished—and then two nights before the picnic with everybody present except our Negro employees. I felt the bitterness of watching this go on without doing anything about it. Experience had taught me that, for me at least, the surest way to get answered on the prongs of public opinion and slowly scorched to death was to try to talk and argue this sort of thing. I am blunt and not tactful. This pretty much made up my mind to go ahead. I did not dare think of my family and boys. This thing looked bigger than Hillsboro—maybe it involved millions of boys.

Engineer Ordered To Lima for Observation

Philip Partridge, county engineer, who has confessed to firing the Lincoln elementary school here, was committed to the Lima State Hospital, Friday, by order of the common pleas court.

The engineer is to remain under observation there for a period not to exceed one month.

The order committing Partridge to the institution was filed in common pleas court late Thursday and

signed by Judge George McDowell. Also Thursday, the transcript of the case as heard in Justice of the Peace David Boothby’s court was transferred to the common pleas court.

Sheriff F. F. Gustin and Deputy Howard Dunseith went to Partridge’s residence on North High Street about 7:15 A. M. The engineer had not yet arisen. After

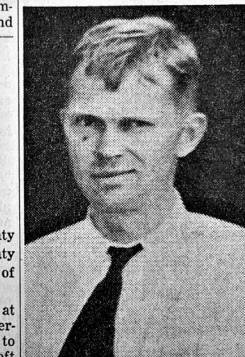
Man Held Here In Hog Theft

Pike Countian to Be
Questioned Monday

Leonard Carter, Pike County man, is being held in the county jail here today on investigation of a charge of stealing livestock.

Carter was arrested Saturday at his home in Pike County by sheriff’s officers, and was expected to be questioned concerning the theft of livestock, Monday.

Sheriff Gustin said that Carter will probably be charged with stealing hogs from the farm of Paul Ryan, of near Sinking Spring. It was understood that authorities are still searching for two men who may also be implicated in the theft.



PHILIP PARTRIDGE

breakfast and after he had read the commitment order, he gathered his clothes, and, accompanied on the trip by his wife, a registered nurse, went along “willingly,” officers said. Partridge offered little comment on the matter, they added.

Fire. School. Unsafe. Not fit for our kids. We have to do something.

“You know, really,” Joyce remembers, “kids weren’t supposed to listen to grown-ups back then.” Nonetheless, she later gathered the gumption to ask about the words she overheard.

“You wasn’t supposed to be listening, Joyce,” Gertrude Clemons scolded her, then softened her tone. “But I will explain it to you.”

Despite the *Brown* decision and Partridge’s arson, which had irreparably damaged Lincoln, Hillsboro’s school board still planned to keep Lincoln open for the

***“Brown did not
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segregation.”***

—Jessica Viñas-Nelson,
desegregation scholar

town’s Black elementary students. The school board made minor repairs, slapped on a fresh coat of paint and declared Lincoln Elementary ready to welcome Black students for the year. Their intentions, said Highland County historian Kati Burwinkel, were obvious. “The school board wanted to make sure there were no illusions,” Burwinkel said, “that the Black students were coming to the white school.”

To many in the Black community, that was unacceptable. So they strategized a plan.

On August 9, Imogene Curtis, Clemons’ neighbor, and other members of Hillsboro’s Black community delivered a petition to the Hillsboro School Board signed by 225 Black residents demanding immediate integration. The board members’ shock was palpable.

“We have been good to our colored people,” one defensive board member said.

“Wonderful,” Curtis responded sharply. “Like if you have a second-hand suit, instead of throwing it away, you give it to colored people.”

The school board refused to budge on its decision to keep Lincoln open. This news didn’t necessarily surprise Curtis, Clemons or the other Black parents. Lincoln had historically lacked the resources of

Washington and Webster. Lincoln was crowded, with first-, second-, and third-grade students all taught in one room. In the winter, the second floor was difficult to heat, so class was often moved to the basement—that is, until the boiler would overheat, sending steam and children streaming upstairs.

As August waned, Curtis and Clemons continued chatting across the fence as they hung their laundry. Why would they send their children into a fire-damaged building with fewer educational resources when the highest court in the land had declared school segregation illegal? They, the mothers decided, would not.

Curtis, Clemons and a few other Black parents enrolled their children into Webster for the start of the 1954-1955 school year. And to Webster their children went. But the first week of classes wasn’t even over before the school board held a special meeting to discuss the “forced integration” of the schools.

“We still believe we made a reasonable request in asking them [the Black students] to use Lincoln School for two more years,” one board member said.

The school board hastily drew up three new school zones. The Washington and

Webster zones were essentially split by the town’s north-to-south thoroughfare, High Street. Conspicuously, however, the school board carved a third school district out of two predominantly Black neighborhoods located in the Washington school zone. The students in this third zone were to attend Lincoln.

The school board maintained that they constructed the school zones “strictly on residential lines.” But Washington and Webster remained overwhelmingly white, and Lincoln remained all Black. In practical terms, this meant that some Black students had to walk past one of the white schools to attend Lincoln. All students were instructed to report to their newly zoned schools on Friday, September 17.

Curtis and Clemons had had enough.

On Friday morning, Clemons dressed Joyce in her Sunday best—pretty dress, neatly folded socks, fancy shoes. Next door, Curtis similarly dressed her son John in dapper trousers and a carefully pleated shirt. A handful of other Black mothers across town did the same with their children. Many congregated in the street for a mile-long walk to Webster Elementary. Others joined along the journey. By the time they arrived at the school, there were a few dozen in the group.

Several mothers accompany Black school children to Webster Elementary School in an attempt to demand that the youngsters be admitted. Photo by Bettmann of Getty Images



“I thought Elsie was better than that.”

—A white employer, after discovering Carolyn Steward’s mother, Elsie, was an integral figure among the marchers

Webster’s school bell rang at precisely 9 a.m. Joyce, John and the other Black children ran through the open doors as they had been doing for the past two weeks. As the mothers milled around on the sidewalk, school officials sent the children back out.

The principal walked out and apologized, explaining that these students were no longer on the roster for the Webster school.

“The nation’s highest court says our children must be allowed to learn with yours,” Curtis argued, her figure casting an imposing shadow on the sidewalk beside the principal.

“I understand,” he assured her. But he still insisted that there was no room for the children. They would have to go to Lincoln. He walked back in.

Clemons and Curtis exchanged glances, turned to their children, and in unison, sent them back in.

The Black children pulled the door open and marched back through. But moments later, they returned. After a third failed attempt, the mothers wearily turned their backs on Webster and shepherded their children back home.

At the end of the school day, the superintendent announced that any child, regardless of race, who did not attend their assigned school on Monday would be considered truant. The school district, he warned, would mete out the appropriate consequences.

Clemons, Curtis and the other Black families were not deterred.

The Lincoln School marchers were just getting started.

Carolyn Steward carefully chose her dress for the day, as she did every school day. She brushed her hair, ran down the steps and sidled up to the breakfast table, just like the day before. The sun was starting to peek through the windows as she heard her mom run through the morning ritual: Eat breakfast, put your school clothes on, don’t forget your shoes.

They were running late, as usual. But with seven siblings, Carolyn was used to it. She left the house with her mom and a few siblings, including older sister Virginia and younger brother Ralph. They walked down Collins Avenue, over to North West Street and then to the Church of Christ. Carolyn had the route memorized. They had, at this point, been walking it daily for well over a year, every school day. In their original route, they had walked past the Washington Elementary construction zone, but men working on the building would wait until the mothers and children got close and then drop their pants. So they adjusted to this less obscene path.

At the church, they met up with their friends Joyce Clemons, John Curtis, Teresa Williams and Myra Cumberland. The group of mothers and children was 50 people strong and stretched half a block as they marched down the sidewalk. A few marchers carried carefully crafted signs above their heads.

“I can’t go to school because of segregation,” one said.

“Our children play together. Why can’t they learn together?” said another.

Carolyn noticed Joyce with a grin on her face and a spring in her step. But Teresa wasn’t enjoying herself one bit; she had

broken her hip when she was attending Lincoln, and it still hurt to walk. So went these daily marches—for some, they were an adventure. For others, they were nothing more than tedium or, worse, blister-inducing rituals. Either way, they always ended the same.

After another couple blocks, Webster finally came into view.

Carolyn looked for the window. Right on cue, as she and the other Black children approached, a gaggle of children waved to them with their small white hands. Carolyn waved back. Maybe today would be the day she could join them.

Suddenly, a long white arm reached toward the window's center, and the blinds crashed down. As Carolyn and the others reached the steps of the school, the principal walked out.

"Sorry, folks," he said. "Nothing has changed."

After being turned away, the group walked another mile back to the east side of town, and the children divided into several houses based on age. In a gesture of mutual aid, the mothers set up learning centers in their homes to ensure that their children's education wouldn't lag behind their grade level. They called them kitchen schools.

Each school day was carefully structured. The day started with lessons prepared by volunteer teachers from nearby Wilmington College. Then the children enjoyed a short recess. "They'd give you a little time to run out and play for a minute," Carolyn remembers. "You weren't out there very long, and it was time to come back in. So you didn't have very much play time." After another stretch of lessons, the children ate lunch—a highlight of the day. "Whatever

house we were in, they had a lunch for us," Carolyn recalls. "We didn't go hungry while we were there. You know, because it did turn out to be a long day."

The boycott of the local school district was only one aspect of the Black community's protest. They were also guiding a civil lawsuit through the federal court system.

On September 22, 1954—just five days after they were initially turned away from Webster—the mothers filed a lawsuit against the Hillsboro School District with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At age 12, Joyce Clemons was among the oldest marchers so was chosen as lead plaintiff. The case would become known as *Clemons v. Board of Education*.

The timing of the case was ideal for the NAACP. The organization and its chief counsel Thurgood Marshall—who would later become a Supreme Court Justice himself—were in search of cases to test the scope of the *Brown* decision and clarify how the law would work in practice. How, for example, would people interpret "all deliberate speed?"

In Hillsboro, the NAACP filed a temporary injunction requiring integration to begin immediately while the case was tried, but the move was blocked by a federal judge.

Marshall and the NAACP enlisted the help of Constance Baker Motley, a high-profile strategist in the civil rights movement who eventually won several landmark civil rights cases and later became a federal judge. Although Motley was the face of the case in the courtroom, the mothers and their families carried the bulk of the case's burden.

"Our children play together. Why can't they learn together?"

—A marcher's sign



The five plaintiffs and their attorneys stand in court on Sept. 29, 1954 while on their precedent-shattering mission. Front row, left to right: Plaintiffs Elsie Steward, Roxie Clemons, Zella Cumberland and Gertrude Clemons. Back row, left to right: Attorney Russell L. Carter, plaintiff Norma Rollins and attorneys Constance Baker Motley and James H. McGee. Photo by Harvey Eugene Smith of AP

Sallie Williams, Seleicka Dent, Joan Zimmerman and Gertrude Clemons stand with children inside Webster Elementary School on April 3, 1956. The day before, the Supreme Court refused to intervene in the Marching Mothers' case, thereby rendering as valid the lower court's ruling to integrate the school. But Principal Harold Henry once more denied the Black children permission into classrooms, saying the district was awaiting official notification of the court's decision. **Photo by Bettmann of Getty Images**



Like millions of Black women at the time, many of the marching mothers worked as domestic helpers in white homes. Elsie Steward, Carolyn's mother and a widowed mother of nine, risked her employment to serve as a plaintiff on the case. One day, her employer found out that she was a key figure in the marches and resulting trial. "Well," her white employer lamented, "I thought Elsie was better than that."

In the face of threats and risks to their livelihoods, the mothers persevered for almost two years as the case wound its way through the legal system—becoming experts in legalese while marching every school day, regardless of scorching heat or freezing rain.

The case included three critical junctures. In the first, a federal judge in Cincinnati ruled in favor of the Hillsboro School Board, arguing that the plan to integrate the elementary school in two years was sufficient. Then the mothers and NAACP appealed that decision to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, who sided with the mothers and instructed the original judge to order integration. With high hopes, the school board appealed that decision to the Supreme Court.

Finally, in April 1956, the Supreme Court declined to review the case, effectively agreeing with the second decision and forcing the Hillsboro school board to integrate immediately.

The Lincoln School mothers had won.

The case the marchers fought so diligently to win had far-reaching implications. Hillsboro became a source of inspiration for other Ohioans fighting for integration. It also laid the groundwork for subsequent legal battles in places as far away as Texas.

But while the case inspired change nationally, the celebration in Hillsboro was muted. The Hillsboro School Board ensured the Black families paid a hefty price for their actions. While the board agreed to fully integrate schools in the fall of 1956, all but one of the student marchers were held back one or even two grade levels.

"The mothers get the success and the kids go into the school," said Burwinkel, the local historian. "But now the kids pay the price."

Myra Cumberland sat in a circle with her new classmates, filled with nervous excitement despite being forced to re-do the same grade she had already completed in her kitchen school. It was the fall of 1956, and reading class was about to start. Myra was especially delighted with her dress—a purple skirt with a white bodice and purple dots. Her toes wiggled nervously inside her shoes as the teacher began the lesson, but she remained quietly attentive.

Myra glanced at the two girls beside her, whose whispered chatter distracted her. Then she turned back to the teacher sitting beside her. The teacher's thick-soled shoes, inches from Myra's dress, also tapped nervously. Suddenly, in one swift motion, the teacher's head turned toward Myra, and she struck Myra's dress with her shoe.



SHARING THIS STORY

The story of the Lincoln School Marchers is an important one in America's fight for racial justice. For years, it went largely untold. Ohio Humanities is proud to share this story in myriad ways, including helping fund "The Lincoln School Story," a 20-minute documentary film. Ohio Humanities has also created a discussion guide for book clubs, film clubs, community groups, nonprofits and families to prompt learning and thoughtful discussion. Access the documentary film, discussion guide and more by using this QR code or visiting ohiohumanities.org.

Two Black children sit in the rear row of a third-grade classroom in Webster Elementary School. Photo by AP



“Now the kids pay the price.”

—Kati Burwinkel, Hillsboro historian

“Be quiet!” she hissed at Myra. “It’s people like you...”

Myra, introspective, stifled her tears as she looked at the shoe print that now marred her dress.

Later, during art time, the teacher circled the room as students practiced drawing shapes. One of the chatty girls from the reading circle was seated at a desk beside Myra. They were each drawing stars. The teacher walked past, lingering over Myra’s classmate and praising her art. When she turned to Myra, her demeanor shifted.

“See what she can do?” the teacher said. “*She* drew a star. That’s something you will *never* be able to do.”

Despite that specific teacher, Myra found allies in some of her white classmates. Once, in a different class, Myra stood up to sharpen a pencil when that teacher briefly left the room. “Don’t touch me,” one boy nastily said as Myra passed him. Two of Myra’s friends—both white boys—took the bully by the leg and hung him out of the window on the second floor until he apologized. By the time the teacher returned, the boy was back in his seat but flushed. “What’s wrong?” the teacher asked. The bully had, apparently, learned his lesson. “Nothing,” he said.

Myra, along with the other Black students attending Webster, now faced many of the same discriminations inside of the school that they had faced outside of it.

“It was really tough for the Black students,” said Viñas-Nelson, the desegregation scholar. “The school board had spent years saying that it was the children’s fault and their parents’ fault for causing useless controversy. Teachers and their classmates had been told the same things. And now they are looking at these kids that are two years older than them in their classrooms.”

The student marchers faced verbal and emotional abuse by classmates and teachers alike.

One child was forced to practice her drums in a school closet while the white children attended class in the music room.

Another was assigned a seat by the bathroom door—the worst spot in the classroom.

A third remembers simply being alone. In a room full of children, not one made him feel welcome.

The trauma from those consequences lingers.

“With every good thing that’s accomplished, there’s always a cost,” observes Eleanor Curtis Cumberland, the older child of Imogene Curtis. Although she was in high school by the time the march started, she watched her mother sacrifice herself for the sake of social justice. “You know, it wasn’t all sunshine and blue skies and happy days. They’re still living with some of the repercussions from this fight—memories that they can’t shake.”

Eleanor Curtis Cumberland sat against a window in the cramped Highland County Courthouse, the faint spring sunlight glancing across her neck. As commissioners took their seats at the front table, Cumberland readied herself for a fight.

It was March of 2022, and the commissioners, she thought, needed a reprimand. Her mother's fight for equality was not to be dismissed; it was to be celebrated.

In 2020, a small group of dedicated residents erected a marble bench on the courthouse grounds in honor of the marchers' tenacity. Just the act of erecting the bench took perseverance. The materials for the bench were donated by a local business, but collecting the names of all 55 marchers—18 mothers and 37 children—was tedious work for Shawn Captain, the grandson of a student marcher.

While county officials welcomed the idea of installing a bench on the courthouse grounds, they originally wanted it to face a side street. "I didn't want it there," Cumberland said. "I wanted it on the front street where it could be displayed and seen." Cumberland and Captain successfully lobbied officials to cement it in a place of prominence.

Now, less than two years later, county commissioners were entertaining the possibility of removing the memorial bench from the front of the courthouse to make space for an extended seating wall that would complement a nearby fountain.

Cumberland gathered at the meeting with other members of Hillsboro Against Racial Discrimination (HARD), an organization that works for a more just

and equal community. As the meeting was called to order, Cumberland voiced her concerns. Today, the bench remains in its place of prominence facing Hillsboro's main thoroughfare.

Cumberland is still an active part of Hillsboro's vibrant Black community. She is not only a member of HARD, but also a central part of a small group of former Lincoln School students who are committed to keeping the story of the march, and their mothers, alive. Together with Joyce Clemons Kittrell, Carolyn Steward Goins, Virginia Steward Harewood, Myra Cumberland Phillips and Teresa Williams, all of whom are in their 70s or 80s, Eleanor regularly travels around southwestern Ohio to share the story of the Lincoln School marchers.

The former Lincoln school students talk often about the love, pride and appreciation they have for their mothers.

"I know who wrote the letters," Eleanor Curtis Cumberland said. "I know who made the phone calls. I know who the newspapers contacted during this fight. My mom fought for other people's rights 'til the day she died. That's just who she was."

For these women, the story is as much about the present as it is about the past, both locally and nationally. Clemons thinks of the story as a powerful reminder of how children can be led to understand racial differences. "We have to be able to explain to kids that you may be a little light, you may be a little brown, but you're all the same. We have to get that into their heads."

Other women speak with humility about the important role they and their mothers played in the Civil Rights Movement.

Marchers Joyce Clemons Kittrell, Myra Cumberland Phillips, Teresa Williams, Carolyn Steward Goins, Eleanor Curtis Cumberland and Virginia Steward Harewood stand present day in Hillsboro, Ohio—two of them holding medals from the induction of the Lincoln School Marchers into the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame. They travel around the community, hoping to keep alive their mothers' legacy of bravery and tenacity.



"Back then, I probably didn't think I was part of the Civil Rights Movement," Myra Cumberland Phillips said. "But now, yes, I do."

Their mission is to celebrate their mothers' central role in the Civil Rights Movement in the public discourse.

To Viñas-Nelson, the story of the Lincoln School marchers is really a story about the power of small groups in establishing profound, lasting change. Local people and local leaders drove the Civil Rights Movement, she said—a realization she hopes can shift the paradigm of how social change happens today.

"If you think you have to be a Martin

Luther King or a Rosa Parks to lead a civil rights movement, no one's ever going to lead a civil rights movement, because the movements didn't start from those high pillars," she said. "All of these movements happen by local people starting them."

The marchers hope that sharing their story inspires others to remember their mothers and continue the work they started.

"My mom couldn't have done it without the other mothers," Eleanor Curtis Cumberland said.

"So that's my purpose—to see that my mama's work isn't lost. And that this fight goes on, that this story goes on."

MEET THE MARCHERS



ELEANOR CURTIS
CUMBERLAND, 79

Mother: Imogene Curtis

“People would come to my mother for a lot of different things, like if they were having housing discrimination or job discrimination or even problems with the courts. My mom wrote letters to prisons and lawyers and to judges on people’s behalf. So I know what my mom did. With every fight, you have to have somebody leading it.”

JOYCE CLEMONS
KIT'TRELL, 80

Mother: Gertrude Clemons

“At that time, the parents were very strict about learning. My dad always told me, ‘You do 100%. If you can do 150%, you do it.’ And so that kind of helped a lot, you know? We knew we had to do it because we’d have been right back where we were before if we didn’t—not allowed to go places and not allowed to do things.”



MEET THE MARCHERS

MYRA CUMBERLAND PHILLIPS, 74

Mother: Zella Mae Cumberland

“We’ve still got a long way to go, but I hope children today learn what we actually, really went through. And really, I never sat down and explained it all to my boys until after this (documentary) film came out. I didn’t think they would be interested. I never did explain it to them when they were little. I just would say, ‘You better get an education.’”



TERESA WILLIAMS, 79

Mother: Sallie Williams

“I have often been asked, how did we get along with kids after we got into Webster School. We would tell the difference from the kids who knew about the desegregation problem in Hillsboro. Because the kids who didn’t have a problem playing with us, it wasn’t being talked about in their homes. The kids who had a problem with the Black students knew about the desegregation problem in Hillsboro.”



MEET THE MARCHERS



**VIRGINIA STEWARD
HAREWOOD, 76**

Mother: Elsie Steward Young

“I mean, two or three months (of marching) was something. But we went for two years every day, rain or shine. I thought, ‘Why do we have to continue to do the same thing over and over when we knew they weren’t going to let us in?’ So, at 8, you can imagine what that was like.”

**CAROLYN STEWARD
GOINS, 74**

Mother: Elsie Steward Young

“(Being held back) wasn’t nice. It wasn’t fun at all. We already knew all that we had learned from the kitchen schools when they put us back. So we knew everything they were trying to teach us. It still bothers me. It makes me mad. But, you know, we met so many nice people. I wasn’t fond of going back to school, but I enjoyed all the kids that I got acquainted with.”



RALPH STEWARD, 72

Mother: Elsie Steward Young

“I appreciate everything my mother did, because she made it easier for the Black kids to go to school. And we’ve had several that have graduated college. And it all stems from what happened in ‘54 to ‘56. I don’t want people to feel sorry for me, but sorry for the way that we were treated. There’s so many things we were not able to do because of our skin color. And it’s not right. I would hope that they wouldn’t ever want to go backward. We need to continually go forward.”