



Thelma Perkins

Thelma Perkins was born Thelma Dale on October 23, 1915, in the Historic Anacostia district of Washington, D.C. The youngest of four children, Thelma is directly related to the most prominent African American families in the Nation's capital during the Reconstruction era. Her uncle, Dr.

Frederick Patterson served as President and President Emeritus of the Tuskegee Institute for more than fifty years. He was also awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1987.

Education was very important in Thelma's family and her parents encouraged her studies. She attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, a college-prep high school for African American students. In 1932, like her grandfather before her, Thelma entered Howard University where she studied teaching and social work. After graduating in 1936 she stayed at Howard to conduct graduate work in Sociology under prominent sociologist Dr. E. Franklin Frasier, concentrating on the living conditions of African American families in Washington, D.C.

Inspired by her father's example, Thelma began taking active roles in volunteer and civic organizations while she was in college. She was a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, one of the first African American sororities in the United States. Thelma was also involved in the Liberal Club, a vocal campus group that advocated for the integration of African Americans. Integration continued to be an important cause for Thelma and in the 1940s she accepted the position of acting Secretary of the National Negro Congress. During that time, Thelma assisted with early civil rights activities and formed lifelong friendships with such luminaries as Paul Robeson and Dr. W.E.B. DuBois.

After the death of her husband, Lawrence R. Perkins, Thelma relocated to Chapel Hill in 1998 to be closer to her daughter. She moved into Carol Woods and has been a proud resident of that community for more than a decade. She is also a member of the Community Church of Chapel Hill Universalist Unitarian Association. Thelma has continued civic involvement as an active member of the Friends of the Chapel Hill Senior Center for more than ten years, where she works to improve the lives of local senior citizens. She has also helped organize voter registration drives, health fairs and concerts. Though she has only lived in Chapel Hill a short time, Thelma has contributed well over two thousand volunteer hours to improving her new community.

- Thelma considers her most significant contribution to be helping unite the community behind the creation of the Robert Seymour Center in Chapel Hill. She worked closely with Rev. Robert Seymour in advocating for construction of the new center and sought to promote a close alliance with the local hospitals to make senior citizen health a focus of the Seymour Center. She is especially proud of how the Center serves as a conduit for senior citizens of rural Orange County.
- She cites growth as the most noticeable change to Chapel Hill since she moved here two decades ago, particularly noticing more businesses and more opportunities. Thelma also notes the progress made towards advancing the quality of life for senior citizens in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, though she feels there is still room for improvement.
- Thelma's fondest memory of Chapel Hill came well before she moved to the community in 1998. While she was in college, she participated in the Southern Negro Youth Conference

with some friends. On the long drive back to Howard, they stopped in Chapel Hill to rest, where a UNC faculty member opened up his home to the weary students. Thelma still remembers this first impression of the kind and welcoming town she now calls home!

- Thelma's wish for Chapel Hill and Carrboro is that the youth of the community take on the challenge of creating a completely integrated society by meeting the aspirations of equality and inclusion set by the older generations.