

ROBERT RUSSA MOTON MUSEUM

Birthplace of the Student-led
Civil Rights Movement
Farmville, Virginia



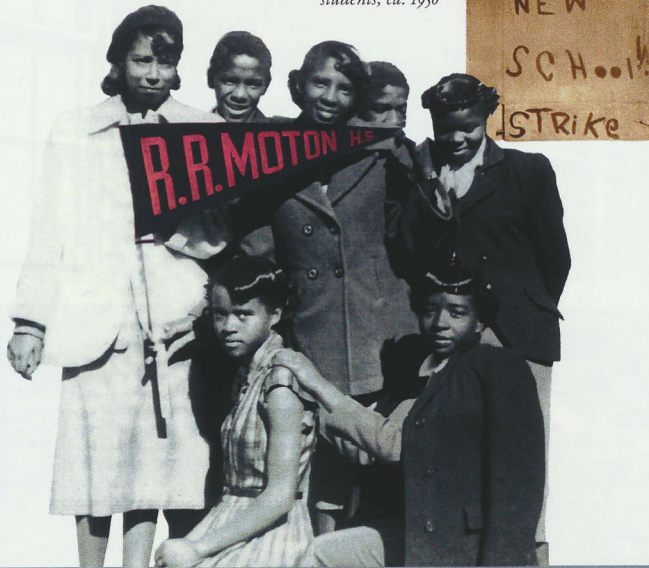
“Before Selma, before Montgomery, there was Fa

The mission of the Robert Russa Moton Museum is to preserve and constructively interpret the history of civil rights in education, specifically as it relates to Prince Edward County, and the leading role its citizens played in America’s transition from segregation toward integration. Moton strives to promote dialogue and advance positions that ensure empowerment within a constitutional democracy.

The Museum’s permanent exhibition, *The Moton School Story: Children of Courage*, tells the stories of the Prince Edward students who expanded the meaning of equality for all Americans.

Right: Original placard from the Moton student strike, 1951.

Below: Moton High School students, ca. 1950



The Walk-out Generation

On April 23, 1951, a group of Moton High School students walked out of their school and into history.

To protest the overcrowded and inferior facilities at their school, sixteen-year-old Barbara Johns, niece of civil rights pioneer the Rev. Vernon Johns, organized and led a two-week strike, during which students refused to attend classes. The students called upon lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), including Oliver W. Hill, to help them in their struggle for equal educational opportunities.

The NAACP agreed to take the Prince Edward case on the condition that students and their parents would sue to challenge the constitutionality of segregation, not just to improve school conditions. Moton students and their parents agreed, and the case *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* advanced to the Supreme Court, along with cases from four other states.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court decided these five cases in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation in public education unconstitutional.

Although a constitutional victory had been won, implementation of the *Brown* decision involved decades of struggle. The state of Virginia imposed a policy of “massive resistance” that would effectively delay school desegregation until the 1960s.

“We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN
MAY 17, 1954

1896

U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* establishes “separate but equal” doctrine.

1939

Moton School built to hold 180 students.

1940s

Enrollment grows to over 450; “tar-paper shacks” built (below). Moton PTA petitions for new high school.

1951

Moton students strike to protest conditions.

First lawsuit filed, *Davis v. County School Board*, calling for an end to segregated education.

1953

New Moton High School built for Black students. Old building becomes Mary E. Branch Elementary #2.

1954

Davis case decided in Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declares segregated education unconstitutional.

1955

Supreme Court rules in *Brown II* that public school desegregation should occur “with all deliberate speed.”

1959

Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors votes to close public schools rather than desegregate them.



COURTESY TIME LIFE INC.

New Moton high school locked



Farmville, where young people made history.”



THOMAS J. O'HALLORAN, PHOTOGRAPHER. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT MAGAZINE COLLECTION

Students arrive for the first day of Free School at Moton, September 1963

The Lock-out Generation

In 1959, under federal court order to desegregate its schools, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors voted not to fund the schools, effectively closing them.

The school closings dramatically affected lives. Teachers lost their jobs. Families sent their children out of the county to attend school. Many children simply did not go to school.

Led by the Rev. L. Francis Griffin of Farmville's First Baptist Church, the students chose to fight for their right to public education through the courts. Community members organized training centers and grassroots schools for children to attend as they waited for the courts to resolve the crisis.

By 1963, local young people were frustrated by the slow pace of change and inspired by the broader civil rights movement then sweeping the South. They staged nonviolent protests to protest the school closings and an end to segregation in downtown Farmville.

These protests were one of the motivations for the U.S. Department of Justice, under the leadership of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, to help establish the Prince Edward Free Schools. During the 1963–1964 school year, they provided children with free education while the Prince Edward case made its way to the Supreme Court.

In *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, the Supreme Court ordered the reopening of Prince Edward County public schools. This generation of students sacrificed five years of their own education to guarantee children in other communities would not be deprived as they had been.

Together, the Walk-Out generation and the Lock-Out generation of Prince Edward students proved brave, creative and resilient in their pursuit of justice and equality for all Americans.



Moton defenders Oliver Hill, Roy Wilkins, and the Rev. L. Francis Griffin

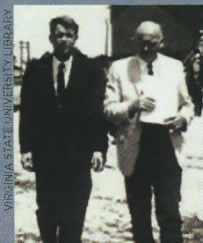
1963–64

Prince Edward Free Schools open to provide free education to all children in the county.

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy visits the county in May 1964.

1964

County schools reopen after Supreme Court ruling in *Griffin v. County School Board*.



WISCONSIN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

1995

After 56 years of service, building is closed. Martha E. Forrester Council of Women commits to lead conversion of Moton School to Moton Museum.

Bobby Kennedy visiting Moton School in 1964

1998

Moton School named a National Historic Landmark.

2001

Museum opens on the 50th anniversary of the student strike.

2011

First phase of *The Moton School Story: Children of Courage* exhibition debuts on the 60th anniversary of the student strike.

2013

The Moton School Story: Children of Courage permanent exhibition opens.

2015

Moton Museum enters partnership with Longwood University.



The Moton School Story: Children of Courage

Robert Russa Moton

The former Robert Russa Moton High School is now a National Historic Landmark and Virginia's leading civil rights museum. Built in 1939, the school was named for Robert Russa Moton, the second principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, who had grown up in nearby Rice, in eastern Prince Edward County.

Moton was born August 26, 1867, in adjacent Amelia County to Booker and Emily Brown Moton. The family moved to Rice soon after his birth. Moton's parents encouraged him to pursue an education, something they had been denied in slavery.

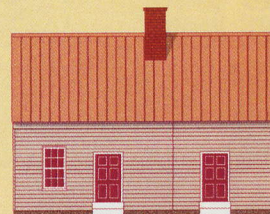
Moton attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, founded in 1868 to educate African Americans to be teachers, artisans, and farmers. He graduated in 1890, and studied the law while still a student, passing the bar soon after graduation. Moton soon returned to Hampton to become commandant of student cadets, a position he served in for almost 25 years.



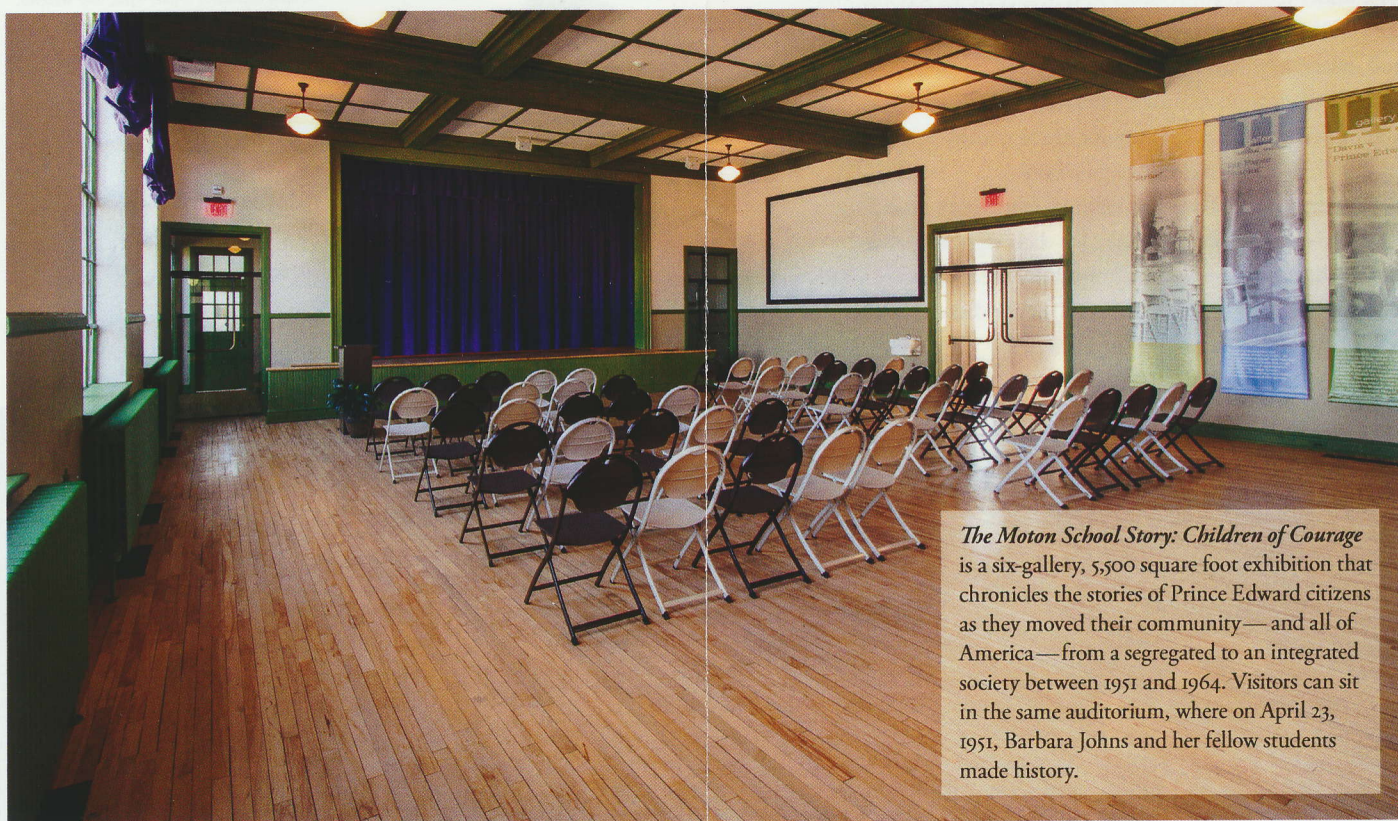
At Hampton, Moton earned a reputation as a leader highly interested in expanding education for African Americans. In 1912, he helped found the Negro Organization Society of Virginia, which had the motto "Better Schools, Better Health, Better Homes, Better Farms." He met and worked closely with Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute. Upon Washington's death in 1915, Moton succeeded Washington as president of Tuskegee.

Moton led the Institute for twenty years, during which time he introduced liberal arts courses, expanded the physical campus, and increased the school's endowment. He also served as an adviser on race relations to U.S. Presidents.

After World War I, he acquired the first airplane for the Institute. Moton's commitment to aeronautics led to the flight training field to be named for him and to the Tuskegee Airmen making their indelible mark upon American history. In 1935, Moton retired to his home Holly Knoll in Capahosic, Virginia, where he died in 1940.



Moton's boyhood home near Pleasant Shade in Prince Edward County



The Moton School Story: Children of Courage is a six-gallery, 5,500 square foot exhibition that chronicles the stories of Prince Edward citizens as they moved their community—and all of America—from a segregated to an integrated society between 1951 and 1964. Visitors can sit in the same auditorium, where on April 23, 1951, Barbara Johns and her fellow students made history.



ROBERT RUSSA

MOTON MUSEUM

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Museum Hours of Operation

Monday through Saturdays, 12 noon – 4:00 p.m.

Groups: Please call or email our Guest Services Coordinator to arrange tours. Free admission.

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