

Ralph Johnson Papers

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Born September 11, 1904, Ralph Johnson was of self-proclaimed Scotch-African ancestry. His father died in 1912, and he was raised by his mother, Bessie Johnson. He went through the 7th grade in Davidson, North Carolina, then attended school in Statesville, North Carolina, while apprenticing as a barber.

After he received his training, he moved back to Davidson and worked as a barber, next to his uncle's shop, before opening Johnson's Barber Shop on March 24, 1921. He moved his business a few times and finally settled on Main Street. Some felt like an African-American should not have such a prominent piece of property and damaged windows and demonstrated in front of it. Johnson's business prevailed.

He retired and closed his business after fifty years on November 15, 1971. During his years of business in the community, he had many Davidson College students, community leaders, and even Secretary of State Dean Rusk in his shop.

During retirement, he wrote his memoir, *David Played a Harp*, published by Blackwell Ink, Inc. It addresses the humorous side of his life and business as well as the painful issues of segregation and division in a small Southern town.

He died unmarried at age 97 in Mooresville, North Carolina, on November 21, 2001.

SERIES LIST

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