



The More You Know: RESOURCES FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Reconstruction 360 is a project of South Carolina ETV that allows students to explore aspects of Reconstruction in a 360-degree environment with short documentary films. The site contains lesson plans and primary documents for further educator support. *Learn more at reconstruction360.org.*

Columbia City of Women is a great resource for local women's history. The nominees include suffragists, doctors and health workers, Civil Rights activists, attorneys, educators, and more, all who have dedicated their work to change Columbia for the better. *Learn more at columbiacityofwomen.com.*

The Center for Civil Rights History and Research is a joint initiative of the College of Arts and Sciences and the University Libraries at the University of South Carolina. Their website includes lesson plans, podcasts, videos, online site tours, as well as other digital resources. *Learn more at civilrights.sc.edu.*

My Life in the South by Jacob Stroyer, available at Project Gutenberg, is a memoir of Stroyer's life as an enslaved child living at Kensington Plantation in Eastover. It is a quick read for the educator and an opportunity to highlight the voice of a Black youth living during the antebellum era. *Learn more at gutenberg.org/ebooks/15096.*

South Carolina Digital Library has made thousands of plantation records, historic photographs, and oral histories available for use as primary source materials via their website. *Learn more at scmemory.org/topics/african-americans.*



1. Civil rights activist Modjeska Simkins in her home, 1984. *Image courtesy of The State Newspaper Photograph Archive, Richland Library, Columbia, S.C.*

2. Civil rights march on Washington, D.C. by Warren K. Leffler, 1963. *Image courtesy Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress*

ABOUT HISTORIC COLUMBIA

Historic Columbia (HC) preserves places and shares complex stories from the past that connect us in the present and inspire our future.

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Welcome Back to Educator's Edge!

Historic Columbia (HC) continues to bring history to your classroom. In this winter edition of *Educator's Edge*, you will be introduced to resources to help with lesson planning for upcoming curriculum units—**Black History Month, Civil Rights (Grade 5), and Reconstruction (Grade 4)**.

Visit Historic Columbia and tour a house with your class. historiccolumbia.org/field-trips.

LEARN MORE



Book Historic Columbia educators for a Traveling Trunk Lesson! historiccolumbia.org/travelingtrunks. Traveling Trunks are sponsored in part by:

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Meet Beth Johnson

Beth joined HC's education team in September 2023 after retiring as a South Carolina public school classroom teacher. She enjoys sharing her enthusiasm for history with students throughout the Midlands.

When Beth isn't immersed in traveling trunks or field studies, she is gardening, cooking, quilting, or out exploring South Carolina's state parks.



Before Rosa Parks: SARAH MAE FLEMMING

Sarah Mae Flemming photographed by Don Cravens in April 1956, and published in *Life* magazine on May 7, 1956. Image courtesy Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

You've heard of Rosa Parks, but have you heard of Sarah Mae Flemming? Read the story behind *Flemming v. SCE&G*, recognized as the case that paved the way for Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Sarah Mae Flemming Brown (1933-1993)

On June 22, 1954, Sarah Mae Flemming walked from her home at 1107 Page Street in Columbia and boarded a bus operated by the South Carolina Electric & Gas Company (SCE&G) at the intersection of Main and Taylor streets, a routine she followed every weekday morning on her way to work. Flemming, just four days shy of her twenty-first birthday, worked as a maid for a white family in one of Columbia's affluent suburbs. Despite the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education* the previous month, which declared "separate but equal" schools unconstitutional, South Carolina's public spaces remained rigidly segregated. The placement of the color line on Columbia's SCE&G buses, which shifted with the number of Black and white riders, was enforced by the drivers, who were legally vested with the powers of a deputy sheriff.

That morning, Flemming took the seat of a white woman who was exiting the bus. To her left were two African American women and several white women sat closer to the front. According to Flemming's testimony two years later, the driver, Warren H. Christmus, told her, "Can't you wait until someone gets off the bus before you sit down? Get up. And I mean right now." In his defense at trial, Christmus explained that she was sitting in front of two white people.

Embarrassed, Flemming pulled the cord for the next stop, located at Main and Washington streets, despite it being more than two miles from her employers' home. According to Flemming, Christmus blocked her from exiting the front door of the bus with a punch, forcing her back down the aisle to the rear door. She returned home and then to the hospital, where she was examined and released. Although she chose not to mention the incident to her family until the following week, Modjeska Monteith Simkins, state secretary for the South Carolina National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (SC NAACP), heard about the altercation and saw an opportunity to strike another blow to legalized segregation. She hired attorney Phillip Wittenberg, who had tried a similar case and had it dismissed on appeal. On July 21, 1954, Wittenberg filed suit on Flemming's behalf in federal court, alleging that her 14th amendment rights had been violated, and asked for \$25,000 in actual and punitive damages.

Like Simkins, her newfound advocate, Flemming was the eldest child of farmers who owned substantial land, but their similarities largely end there. Her parents, Mack and Rosetta Flemming, raised seven children on 130 acres about four miles north of Eastover. Mr. Flemming also worked on WPA-funded road construction projects. Descendants of men and women enslaved in lower Richland County, neither of the Flemmings received more than an elementary school education. Sarah Mae Flemming entered the workforce after completing 10th grade at the segregated Webber School in Eastover. She then spent the early 1950s working as a maid and sending most of her paycheck to her parents to help support her younger siblings. The lawsuit would thrust her into the national spotlight more than 16 months before Rosa Parks took her seat aboard a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

On February 16, 1955, Judge George Bell Timmerman dismissed the case on the grounds that while "separate but equal" school facilities had been ruled unconstitutional, the statute allowing for "separate facilities for the races in defendant's busses" had not. In coordination with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDEF), led by Thurgood Marshall, local attorneys Matthew J. Perry and Lincoln C. Jenkins joined Wittenberg for the appeal heard by the US Fourth Circuit Court on June 21, 1955. That court overruled Timmerman on July 14, "noting the old doctrine that separate but equal facilities for Negroes are constitutional can no longer be 'regarded as a correct statement of the law.'" (*The State*, August 2, 1955). The *Chicago Defender* touted the ruling two weeks later with the headline, "Court Bans Segregation on City Buses in Dixie."

By then, Timmerman's son, George Bell Timmerman, Jr., had been elected and installed as the 105th governor of South Carolina. Governor Timmerman, SC Attorney General T.C. Callison, and Mayor J. Clarence Dreher, Jr., pledged to aid SCE&G in bringing the appeal to the Supreme Court. The highest court dismissed the appeal as frivolous on April 23, 1956, leaving most observers sure that the ban on segregation on intrastate buses was deemed unconstitutional. Callison called it "another unwarranted invasion of state and municipal rights," and the leaders of the Citizens Councils of South Carolina claimed the ruling was "dictatorial and unconstitutional." Flemming, speaking to the Associated Press, offered two sentiments: "It was the right thing to do," and "I only hope it won't lead to trouble." (*The State*, April 25, 1956)

Judge Timmerman would subsequently preside over two trials in 1956 and 1957, both with all-white, all-male juries. In describing the proceedings, *The State* reporters repeatedly referred to the now-married Flemming as "the Flemming woman," or "the Brown woman," and her witness, a Black woman named Elizabeth King, as "the King woman." The first trial began June 12, 1956, with Sarah Mae Brown represented once again by Phillip Wittenberg. That night, the Ku Klux Klan burned an eight-foot-tall cross in his yard. Timmerman dismissed the case the following day, before the defense could present witnesses. Brown, represented by Lincoln C. Jenkins and Robert L. Carter, again successfully appealed before the US Fourth Circuit Court, who on November 29, 1956, sent the case back to Timmerman. The final trial, in which Matthew J. Perry joined Jenkins for the plaintiff, proceeded to jury deliberations on June 11, 1957. After 30 minutes, they decided SCE&G still owed Sarah Mae Flemming Brown nothing.

Brown and her husband lived the rest of their lives in Eastover, raising three children: John Earl, Wanda, and Bruce. She died in 1993 at the age of 59, having never spoken publicly about her role in ending segregated travel accommodations.

Essay from Columbia City of Women, a project of Historic Columbia. Visit columbiacityofwomen.org to read more about the women who have transformed Columbia, and book a Civil Rights Traveling Trunk to learn about other local changemakers.



Attorneys Lincoln C. Jenkins, Jr. and Matthew J. Perry, Jr., plaintiff Sarah Mae Flemming, and Julia Elizabeth King, who testified on Flemming's behalf, pose for photographer John W. Goodwin. Image courtesy the John H. McCray papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia

Upcoming EVENTS

HISTORICCOLUMBIA.ORG/EVENTS



History Walking Tours
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Heathwood | February 25
University Hill | March 10 & June 9
Main Street | May 12



Wavering Place Tours
Sat., March 16 | 11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

This outdoor tour of Wavering Place will explore how the site held very different meanings to the people who lived there through the centuries.



Kensington Mansion Tours
Sat., May 18 | 10:00 a.m. & 2:00 p.m.

Join Sylvamo and Historic Columbia for an exclusive public access tour of the antebellum Kensington Mansion.