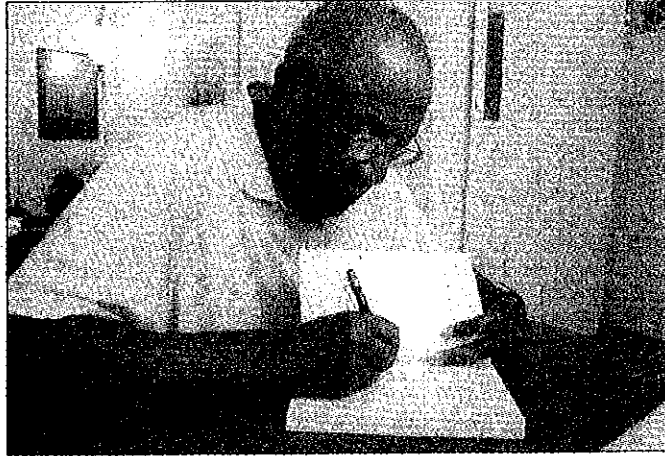


# 'I Walked The Sloping Hills'

*NCCU's Walter Brown pens memoir*



THE HERALD-SUN | PHOTOS BY MARY LIDE PARKER  
Walter Brown signs a copy of his memoir, "I Walked the Sloping Hills."

*His role as university's first Education  
School dean is just part of the story*

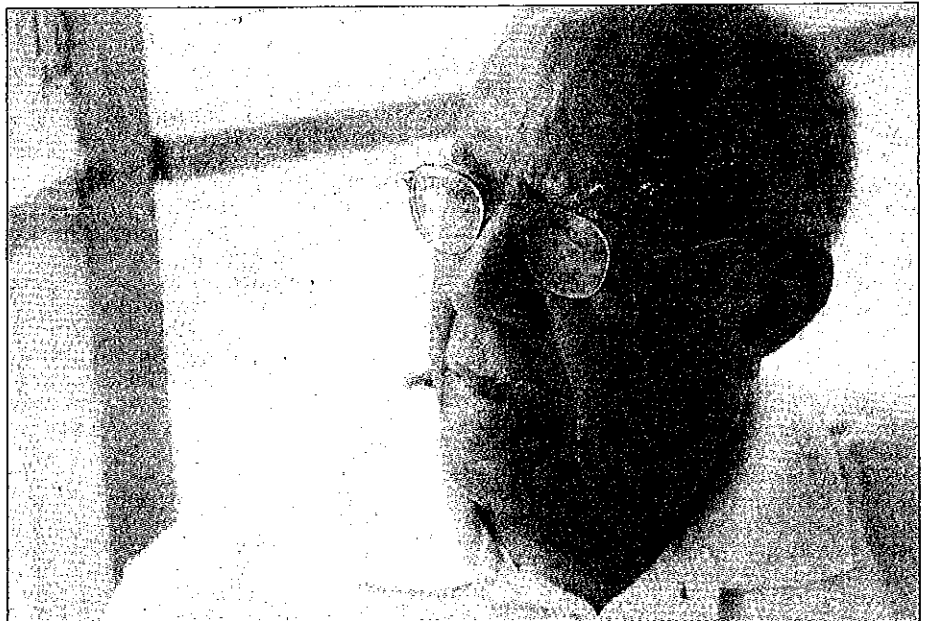
**BY DAWN BAUMGARTNER  
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**DURHAM** — Those involved with N.C. Central University over the past few decades know Walter M. Brown as the first dean of the School of Education, who retired in 1992.

But those who have lived longer know there is much more to the career of Brown, who grew up in Durham, attended NCCU back when it was N.C. College, served in the military, lived in Harlem and Washington, D.C., and was an integral part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty during the mid-1960s.

Brown has recently published his memoir, "I Walked the Sloping Hills," a reference to NCCU's song. Now 83, he was born in 1927 and grew up in the Brookstown neighborhood in the West End. In his memoir that spans from boyhood to 2009, he talks about



Walter Brown sits in his gazebo behind his house in Durham on Thursday morning. A native of Durham, Brown attended NCCU back when it was N.C. College, served in the military, lived in Harlem and Washington, D.C., and was an integral part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty during the mid-1960s.

# BROWN

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his childhood, including his family and friends and time at Lyon Park School and Hillside High School. Brown includes anecdotes like how his mama wanted him to wear short pants until he was a man. He also talks about the pervasiveness of racism in Durham.

Among the people who served as friends and mentors throughout Brown's life is the late renowned historian and educator John Hope Franklin. Brown has a thriving plumeria plant in his backyard that was given to him by Franklin, one of many people Brown recognizes in "I Walked the Sloping Hills." Others include Alfonso Elder, Carlin Paul Graham, Charles A. Ray, Joe Himes, Howard Roy, Richard Beard, Marion D. Thorpe, Jack Bond and Jim Blue.

One of Brown's chapters, written as a series of vignettes, talks about his early years in academia, and how he stood up to the head of Bennett College in Greensboro.

Brown wondered if he should have used a fictitious name of the Bennett president, but left it in. In other anecdotes, he changed the name because the message was more important than the individual. Like when Brown was fresh out of school and worked for a wallpaper and painting company downtown. He spent arduous hours using steam to peel off five layers of wallpaper in a hotel. Still, he considered wallpaper and painting as a longer term job prospect, and approached the white business owner for an apprenticeship. The man, who was also a preacher, made it clear to Brown that only whites were welcome. It wasn't the first time that his career aspirations were thwarted by racism.

So he kept going another way, into academia. In 1940s Durham, the civil rights movement was still several years off.

"From early childhood, I, like so many of my peers,

## 'SLOPING HILLS' READINGS

Walter Brown  
"I Walked the Sloping Hills"  
Readings

■ 3 p.m. Sunday  
Hayti Heritage Center  
Durham

■ July 7-9  
NCCU Alumni Festival  
Millennium Hotel, Durham

■ 1 p.m. Aug. 8  
Covenant Presbyterian  
Church

2620 East Weaver St.,  
Durham

■ Sept. 29-Oct. 3  
95th Annual Association  
for the Study of African  
American Life and History  
Raleigh Convention Center

placed perhaps a disproportionate emphasis on the value of credentials in education. Somehow felt I'll just pursue this goal, that way realizing benefits I wouldn't otherwise. Also, I don't know that we — my college classmates — saw a better day ahead of us, as members of a racially diverse society," he said.

If there was ever going to be change, Brown said, he didn't think it would be happen radically or quickly.

"I don't want to confuse that with being satisfied with [the status quo] but in terms of being better able to survive than I would otherwise," he said.

The summer of 1945, before Brown went into the Army, he spent a few months living in Harlem. It was a big change from Durham.

"There was a certain romanticism. We were young and excited by the Harlem culture." He was 18 in 1945. In his memoir he writes about seeing black firefighters and police officers for the first time. When he returned at age 21, a newlywed and recent NCCU graduate, for a job and graduate school at New York University, the area was equally as exciting, he said.

"The mass migration of blacks from the American South to, in this case New York, and the Northeast led to a community of blacks within



THE HERALD-SUN | MARY LIDE PARKER

Walter Brown stands in his garden behind his house in Durham on Thursday morning. Brown and his wife Ozie, who passed away in 2008, returned to the South after living in Harlem and serving in the Army.

the metropolitan area who were persons of like mind, similar tastes, very similar aspirations, similar problems and similar strategies for survival," Brown said. Living in New York gave him a modicum of courtliness, he said.

Brown said that he came to realize while living in Harlem that many of the perceived benefits of living in New York were more superficial than substantive. The NCCU alumni chapter in New York City held a fundraising event, and alumni went to local businesses to solicit advertising.

"That's when I learned most of these businesses were not owned by African Americans. And it occurred to me that there were as many black-owned businesses in Durham as there were in Harlem," he said. "That might strike someone as a farfetched notion, but our experience in dealing with merchants in Harlem was quite revealing."

The Browns — his wife Ozie passed away in 2008 — returned to the South for Walter Brown's jobs at Bennett College and N.C. Central. He entered the doctoral program in education at NCCU as soon as it was started, and taught at the university from 1955 to 1965, when an NCCU connection led him to a new job, working for Volunteers In Service To America, or VISTA, and other groups as-

sociated with LBJ's War on Poverty. Brown worked with young people, as most of the volunteers were, and traveled across the country. After President Richard Nixon was elected in 1968 and the program was cut, Brown went to work for Fry and University Associates, two consulting firms in D.C. that also had social programs as clients.

The Browns raised their three girls and didn't expect to ever come back to Durham, other than annually to see family and attend homecoming and alumni events at NCCU. But another job offer called, in 1980, back at Brown's alma mater. He came back to teach and was also the first dean of the NCCU H.M. Michaux Jr. School of Education.

"I had paid my dues and was ready for a change of lifestyle," he said. So he and Ozie moved back South with their two younger daughters, still teenagers. Their oldest daughter was already teaching at Georgetown Day School, and is still there.

He retired in 1992. Brown still lives in the Emorywood subdivision where he bought a house 30 years ago. Brown likes to write, play golf, garden, do calligraphy and take classes through the Duke Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. In was in those classes that his memoir took shape.

"I go to bed each night with great anticipation of the next day," he said.

The Herald Sun  
June 13, 2010

# NCCU's Brown opens his memoirs

Former education  
official has never  
stopped learning

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**DURHAM**— The first African-American to receive a Ph.D. in education from an historically black college or university and the first dean of the N.C. Central University School of Education has penned



**BROWN**

his memoirs, "I Walked the Sloping Hills." Walter Matthew Brown signed copies of his book at the H.M. Michaux Jr. School of Education at NCCU on Tuesday.

Brown, who is originally from Durham and lives here today, entered NCCU in 1952 as the first student in the university's education Ph.D. program. NCCU was the first HBCU to award the degree, followed by Howard University. He taught education at NCCU from 1955 to 1965, then left for

## GO AND DO

Walter Brown  
appearances:  
3 p.m. April 18  
NCCU Art Museum  
1801 Fayetteville St.,  
Durham  
12:15 p.m. May 16  
Trinity United  
Methodist Church  
215 N. Church St.,  
Durham

## BROWN

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was once Brown's student, in the 1960s, and then later worked for him in the school.

Steppe-Jones said he acts now just like he did then.

"He was so philosophical. He always called everything a teachable moment. In class, if we went off in a different direction, it was still great because we were always learning," she said. A calligrapher, when Brown was serving as dean he would write notes in calligraphy to his faculty and staff. On Tuesday, he signed books with calligraphy as well.

Steppe-Jones said the School of Education relishes every opportunity to honor Brown because his career has impacted so many people. "He is such a loving, giving person," she said. The university is looking into naming something at the school after him, she said.

When Brown read to the crowd assembled at his former workplace, he chose a story often requested by his daughters when they get together and reminisce — the one about Mr. Prince.

It was 1960, and the last faculty meeting of the year, when those employees retiring are recognized. Amidst applause, once retiring faculty member was asked how long she had been at the college, and answered 22 years. But when Mr. Prince was called to be recognized, he wasn't there. Later in the meeting, a note was passed announcing his arrival. So the faculty listened as he was wished well and told he would be missed. Then he was asked, "How long have you been here?"

"About 10 minutes," Mr. Prince said.

There are more stories in his book, the professor emeritus said, but you'll have to read it.

For information, visit