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Dentist to be Inducted Into the Florida State Civil Rights Hall of Fame

By Gwendolyn Duncan



Governor Rick Scott announced that Dr. Robert B. Hayling has been chosen as one of three recipients of the 2014 Florida State Civil Rights Hall of Fame

Dr. Robert B. Hayling was often called “...that uppity dentist who did not know his place...”, but now, fifty years after an arduous and challenging campaign was waged to end segregation in the Nation’s Oldest City, he will have a permanent place in the Capitol Building in Tallahassee, Florida. Governor Rick Scott on January 30th, 2014 named Dr. Hayling as one of three recipients of the Florida State Civil Rights Hall of Fame. The Induction Ceremony will take place later this year. Two other prestigious recipients include [A. Philip Randolph](#) and [James Weldon Johnson](#).

Dr. Robert B. Hayling was born in Tallahassee, Florida on November 20, 1929. He is the son of college professor, Charles C. Hayling, Sr. who for thirty-three years served on the faculty of Florida A & M College. He graduated from Florida A & M College in June of 1951 with a BS Degree in Biology. In August 1951, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. In December 1952, he graduated from the Air Force Officer’s Candidate School and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He was assigned to the Aero Medical Research Center, the Department of Toxicology at Right-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio. In December of 1954, he married his classmate and college sweetheart, Athea L. Wake, of Miami,

Florida. After four years of service, he received an honorable discharge with the rank of 1st Lieutenant. He entered Meharry Medical College, School of Dentistry, in Nashville, Tennessee in 1955. In June of 1960 he earned a degree in Dentistry and began his Practice in St. Augustine, Florida. He took over the Practice of Dr. Rudolph Gordon who died in 1959 after an automobile accident and serious health problems. He was the first Black Dentist in Florida to be elected to the local, regional, state, and national components of the American Dental Association. Hayling served as an Adult Advisor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council. For eleven months as the head of the St. Augustine Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). His dental practice was integrated and flourished from the beginning until his civil rights involvement.



In 1963, the City of St. Augustine, FL celebrated its 400th Anniversary of its founding. The United States Government gave the City \$400,000 to help the City in its year-long celebration. No Blacks had been included in the planning or ceremonies in connection with these activities. The Black Population of the City of St. Augustine was approximately 20%. This oversight or exclusion was brought to the attention of the Federal Government, particularly Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson, especially because he was scheduled to participate. The Black community and Dr. Hayling were confronted with many prevailing acts of discrimination in St. Augustine, Florida.

The Black community and Dr. Hayling in St. Augustine were confronted with many prevailing acts of discrimination. He fought in the Civil Rights Movement alongside such notable civil rights activists as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Nobel Prize Laureate), Rev. Ralph Abernathy (SCLC), Rev. Andrew Young (former mayor of Atlanta, GA and Ambassador to the United Nations under President Jimmy Carter), Rev. Thomas Wright (former NAACP Youth Counselor), Mr. Henry Twine (former St. Augustine City Commissioner and Vice-Mayor, former NAACP President, and Great Floridian Recipient), Kathryn ‘Kat’ Twine (Civil Rights Activist/Recipient of the St. Augustine DeAviles Award), Mrs. Mary Peabody (mother of Governor Chuck Peabody of Massachusetts), Mrs. Esther Burgess (wife of the first Black Episcopal Bishop from Boston, MA), Rev. Goldie Eubanks, Sr. (SCLC), Rev. C. T. Vivian (SCLC), Rev. Hosea Williams (Chief Lieutenant, SCLC), Rev. C.K. Steele (SCLC), and others



joined to lead non-violent civil rights demonstrations to desegregate St. Augustine white business establishments who practiced such discriminatory practices as refusing to serve blacks at their hotels, restaurants, and lunch counters. For his continued fight to right the injustices perpetrated upon him and his fellow blacks and other activist citizens, his home was shot into with high powered rifles barely missing his pregnant wife, Athea, and killing his dog which was within the home. His wife and two daughters escaped without physical injury.

On another occasion, Dr. Hayling along with Mr. Clyde Jenkins, Mr. James Hauser, and Mr. James Jackson was kidnapped by the Ku Klux Klan. All of the men, except Mr. James Jackson were beaten unmercifully and left semi-conscious. If not for the compassion of a white minister, Rev. Irvin Cheney, who slipped from the Klan Rally and called the State Highway Patrol in Tallahassee, Dr. Hayling and his fellow activist, who were stacked like firewood, would have been burned alive with gasoline. Dr. Hayling received the most serious injuries, suffering hospitalization for fourteen days losing eleven teeth and several broken ribs. Scars he has known to have said, "I'll take to my grave". He and the others were charged with assault, but charges were dropped because the Klan never showed up to court. The Klan was never prosecuted in this case.

In June, 2003, the residents of Rollins Subdivision who lived on Scott Street, Mr. David Nolan (local historian), and the Committee to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Demonstrations (ACCORD) requested that the City of St. Augustine rename Scott Street to the Dr. Robert B. Hayling Place in honor of this outstanding and courageous man. He has been honored and celebrated for his perseverance and love for his fellow man. The Street Re-Naming Ceremony was held on June 20, 2003. The late Dr. Marvin Davies described Dr. Hayling as *the Father of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Florida Memorial University in Miami Gardens, FL on March 13, 2008 honored Dr. Hayling by awarding him the Nathan W. Collier Meritorious Service Award at their Founders 'Day Convocation. ***The Nathan W. Collier Meritorious Service Award*** was established to recognize an individual who has exemplified Dr. Collier's courage, vision, fortitude, and service on behalf of mankind over a period of years. In February 2011, Dr. Hayling was invited to be the Keynote Speaker for the Florida Black Legislators' Distinguished Speaker Series during their Black History Program at the Capitol. This program was held in the House of Representatives Chamber. Just recently the St. Augustine City Commission voted to award Dr. Hayling the City of St. Augustine's prestigious De'Aviles Award: the 2nd highest recognition given to its citizens, which was presented to him at the 6th Annual ACCORD Freedom Trail Luncheon held at the Casa Monica Hotel, 95 Cordova Street, St. Augustine, Florida.

Dr. Hayling has continued his activism over the years from the 1960's. He has had a hand in bringing the Civil Rights Freedom Trail in St. Augustine, FL into existence and helping it to grow. Dr. Hayling is proud to be a founding member and currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Lauderhill Central Homeowners Association. The First Dr. Robert B. Hayling Award of Valor, sponsored by Florida State Senator Anthony 'Tony' Hill, was given to a Freedom Fighter of the St. Augustine Movement during the 3rd Annual ACCORD Freedom Trail Luncheon and has since become and was awarded again during the 4th Annual Luncheon July, 2010.

Dr. Hayling along with fellow demonstrators and ACCORD Members attended a ceremony in Tallahassee on December 9, 2010 in which Governor Crist and his cabinet Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink, Attorney General Bill McCollum, and Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Brunson, sitting as the Executive Clemency Board, all voted in favor of adopting a Resolution exonerating demonstrators of their 1963-64 arrest records for participating in the non-violent struggle for equal rights in St. Augustine, Florida. Many wrote letters in support of this effort including [Attorney Dan R. Warren](#), author of *If It Takes All Summer: Martin Luther King, the KKK, and States' Rights in St. Augustine, 1964*.

[Dr. Kathryn Fentress](#), civil rights activist, also wrote a letter to Senator Hill in which she stated, *"Those arrests caused considerable hardship to many who were not then eligible to work in a variety of occupations and lived with this blemish on their public records...I no longer reside in Florida...actively involved in this movement and a resident at the time. Now would be a good time to honor the folks who sacrificed so much to bring about a more tolerant and humane community and whose efforts help with the passage of the Civil Rights' Bill in 1964. I add my support to this appeal...action would go a long way to heal these hurts of the past and to facilitate a greater sense of harmony and justice for our citizens of St. Augustine and the larger state of Florida. It is Dr. Hayling's belief and wish that his actions and efforts have helped to move the Scales of Justice to a more equal position for all mankind.*

Please stop by the Wells Fargo Bank, 33 King Street, St. Augustine, FL to see historic mural recently unveiled and accessible 24/7 (see picture at top of this page)

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