

## INSIDE

- Puzzles, Horoscope, B2
- Etheridge, Henry blazed path, B3
- Abby: Daughter-in-law reaches out, B4



Stress over violence, other issues multiply for clergy, B2

## Rountree recalls integrating Edenton school

Then 6th-grader first black to attend E.A. Swain in 1964

BY NICOLE BOWMAN-LAYTON  
Chowan Herald

EDENTON — In 1964, Gail Johnson Rountree became the first African American to attend school at E.A. Swain Elementary School, named for the former principal of Edenton Elementary School.

While the then sixth-grader was the only black student to attend Swain that year, several black students integrated John A. Holmes High School the same year through the district's "Freedom of Choice" program. Rountree herself would go on to graduate from Holmes in 1971.

The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Johnson Sr., Rountree went on to attend Elizabeth City State University and later College of The

Albemarle, where she earned a degree in practical nursing. She also attended Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, where she earned All-American recognition, graduated with honors and received a degree in human services and substance abuse. She currently works as a licensed practical nurse in Farmville, Virginia.

According to a column appearing in the *Chowan Herald* in 1975, desegregation of the Chowan County Schools began as early as 1963-64, when then-Superintendent Hiram Mayo began the process of integrating the schools' faculty. "The 'freedom of choice' plan worked and integration took place quietly and uneventfully from public view," the column states.

The *Chowan Herald* recently conducted an interview with Rountree about her experiences integrating what was then the all-white E.A. Swain Elementary



Gail Johnson Rountree, left, as a sixth grade student and right, today. Rountree is a licensed practical nurse who works in Farmville, Virginia, and was the first African-American student to enroll at what was then E.A. Swain Elementary School in 1964. She was in the sixth-grade at the time.

School. Her sixth-grade teacher's name is abbreviated.



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**Q: How old and what grade were you in when you started attending**

**Swain?**  
**A:** I was 12 years old and started at Swain in the sixth

grade, where Ms. M.L.C. was my teacher.

**Q: How did integration work? Were you the only African American for a while before more began attending during the school year?**

**A:** The Civil Rights Movement had just recently begun in Edenton. Three gentlemen from our church (Providence Baptist Church) came to talk to my mom (Mrs. Lula Kelley Johnson, who is now deceased). My dad (Donald J. Johnson Sr., also now deceased) was overseas in the U.S. Navy and my mom wrote and told him all about the situation. There were other African Americans at John A. Holmes High School, but I was the only one at Swain.

**Q: Do you remember how you felt about going to Swain?**

**A:** Three gentlemen (the Rev. F. H. LaGarde, Golden Frinks and William A.

See ROUNTREE, B3

## AoA to host Roaring Twenties Gala fundraiser Saturday

Event will feature catered dinner, dancing, auctions

BY KESHA WILLIAMS  
Correspondent

Arts of the Albemarle will turn back the hands of time Saturday when it holds its Roaring Twenties Gala.

The fundraiser for the local arts group will feature a cocktail hour featuring sparkling wine and hors d'oeuvres followed by a buffet dinner catered by Kelly's

Outer Banks Catering.

The event will also include a live auction of prizes like vacations, a gourmet meal and original art. More than two dozen goods and services will also be auctioned during a silent auction. There also will be a special raffle. A pianist and singer will perform on the Center's ground level during cocktails.

The Top Hats Orchestra, a 12-piece band that performs various styles of swing and dance music, will entertain attendees with 1920s-era

music designed to get them up and dancing.

The Chesapeake, Virginia-based band has dazzled audiences for years with music made famous by Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Harry James, Michael Bublé and more.

Blair Jackson, one of the Roaring Twenties Gala organizers, said the Top Hats Orchestra performs music that's sure to resonate with listeners of all ages.

"They've played on stage before at Arts of the Albemar-

le so anyone who didn't hear them in the past shouldn't miss them when they return on Feb. 29," she said. "They are energetic, classy and they look good wearing those tuxedos and top hats. They have that rich, big band sound that will transport us back to the '20s."

Organizers are hoping attendees will get into the spirit of the event by dressing up in 1920s attire like flapper dresses, Jackson said.

"This event is a fundrais-

er for Arts of the Albemarle that we think people will remember because we're going to have so much fun," she said.

Wine and beer will be served, and in a nod to the 100th anniversary of Prohibition, setups for brown bagging will be available. The theme of the fundraiser comes complements of Museum of the Albemarle exhibit, "Temperance and Bootlegging: A Nation Under Prohibition," and its current Harlem Renaissance

celebration.

The Roaring Twenties Gala will be held at AoA from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Individual tickets are \$125, while bistro tables for two are \$150. The cost for reserved tables for eight is \$1,000 and the cost for corporate tables is \$1,250. Seating is limited.

Tables/tickets can be purchased online at [artsaoa.org](http://artsaoa.org), or purchased by calling 252-777-ARTS. To purchase tickets in person visit AoA, 516 E. Main Street.

## Nixon honored with Mount Olive Alumni Hall of Fame Award

From staff reports

Kristi Nixon of Edenton recently was one of five University of Mount Olive alumni to receive the university's Alumni Hall of Fame Award.

Nixon, who retired as a regional environmental health supervisor after a 30-year career, received the Order of The Long Leaf Pine and the Cardinal Award from Gov. Pat McCrory in 2016.

Nixon served as vice president of the Northeastern Environmental Health District in 2000 and president



NIXON

Nixon graduated from Mount Olive College in 1984. She later obtained her bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and her master's degree from UNC-Pembroke.

of the Environmental Health Section Eastern District for the North Carolina Public Health Association in 2006.

### Pickell named to Univ. of Alabama dean's list

Chloe Madeline Pickell of Moyock was named to the dean's list at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, for the fall 2019 semester.

### Moore named to Gettysburg's dean's list

Harrison Anthony Moore of Elizabeth City was named to Gettysburg College's dean's list for the fall semester.



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The Elizabeth City Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., recently named eight high school students to its Kappa Youth Leadership Development League. Shown are (l-r) Wayman J. White, Cornell McBride, Clarence Goss Jr., Isaac Lister Jr., Logan Goss, Jaiden Lister, Jerron Hinton, Torey Hill, Vincent Wood, QuayMane Griffin, Zaki Evans, Shawn Brothers Jr., James Robertson, Rodney Robinson and Cecil Perry.

## 'Wild's Raid' marker to honor freeing of thousands of enslaved

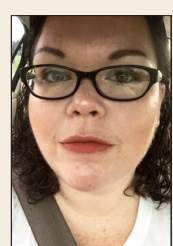
If you haven't heard of Edward A. Wild, fear not readers. Neither had I. But in doing the little bit of research for this brief column, I've learned quite a bit.

Edward A. Wild, best known for Wild's Raid, or Wild's African Brigade, was a colonel in the 35th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, who conducted his first major campaign in North Carolina with African-American infantry in December 1863. This raid would free thousands of enslaved people in the area.

Let's step back a bit though.

Wild was a native of Brookline, Massachusetts, and not only is he known for his military service, he also earned a medical degree from Harvard in 1846 at Jefferson Medical College. He studied homeopathy, which is a pseudoscientific system of alternative medicine, and went on to become a member of the Massachusetts Society of Homeopathy.

### MUSEUM OF THE ALBEMARLE



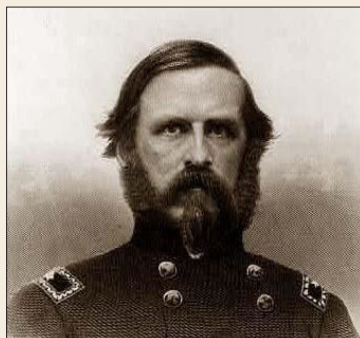
REBECCA STILES

his left arm. After returning home to recuperate, he would recover enough to resume his military duties and was promoted to brigadier general in April 1863.

Wild was a fervent abolitionist and recruited many black soldiers for the U.S. Colored Troops. He also recruited many white officers to lead them. He was friends with fellow abolitionist and author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and would enlist her half-brother, James Beecher, in one of the new regiments.

Wild, as previously stated, freed thousands of enslaved in this area, and safely resettled them on Roanoke Island. He also recruited many of them to join the military. His command of a brigade of black infantry would become known as "Wild's African Brigade." Headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia, the brigade served in Charleston, South Carolina, and saw action in numerous skirmishes and battles in the region, including an expedition to South Mills and Camden Court House.

In three weeks, Wild's troops freed at least 2,500 enslaved people, burned a dozen homes of Southern guerillas, confiscated livestock and supplies from local farms, took women as hostages, and hanged a local fighter by the name of Daniel Bright. This was quite outrageous for a man like Wild, who was a white brigadier general. And while we can still commend him for leading the charge to free thousands of enslaved people, we can still



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Edward A. Wild, best known for Wild's Raid, or Wild's African Brigade, was a colonel in the 35th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, who conducted his first major campaign in North Carolina with African-American infantry in December 1863. The raid would free thousands of enslaved people in the area.

hold him accountable for actions such as Bright's hanging.

Wild was honorably discharged in January of 1866,

receiving no punishment for his actions, which is not surprising. Whether historians want to acknowledge his actions as war crimes is up for discussion. His war injuries meant that he could no longer practice medicine, but he traveled extensively in South America for a time before dying in August 1891.

Wild's name has gained notoriety recently as the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources approved a historical marker to be located near Fearing and South Water streets to commemorate Wild's Raid. The raid he commanded that freed thousands of enslaved people was the largest military operation conducted in North Carolina at the time. If history teaches us anything it's that we don't forget. But accountability shouldn't be forgotten either.

*Rebecca Stiles is an administrative assistant at Museum of the Albemarle.*