

Mr. Charles W. Francis, Jr.,

The Man & The Music, 1920 – 1986

My father, Charles Warwick Francis, Jr. affectionately known as C.W. was the first of five children born to Rev. and Mrs. Charles Francis, Sr. in Huntersville, N.C. on June 20th, 1920. Under the graceful guidance of my grandmother, Almena, who taught him to play the piano, his love for music was born and under her tutelage he flourished. My grandfather, a Presbyterian Minister, accepted a post as Superintendent of Boggs Academy where my father and his siblings would come to know as home. Prior to his graduation from Boggs in 1936 he had composed his 1st piece of music as the age of sixteen. Dad matriculated to Johnson C. Smith, following in the footsteps of my grandfather, and received his degree with a concentration in History. After college he served two tours of duty in the U. S. Army. During his last tour of duty during World War II, he served as Chief Clerk to the Division Chaplain. There he was given the assignment of learning to play the organ. He had already mastered the piano and soon mastered the organ as well. Dad returned to Boggs in 1948 and taught Social Studies and formed the school choir. Having no knowledge in this area, he honed his skills at Hampton Institute and Atlanta University during the summer. He started an "a cappella" group that sang without instruments.

Dad was constantly amazed by the sounds of four-part harmony in the local churches. The Boggs Academy A Cappella Choir became a hallmark of the surrounding community, which inspired worship each Sunday, at concerts and appearances throughout the school year. The Choir travelled in and out of the community. Choir members talked about the way he would talk for almost the entire rehearsal about the meaning of the music, only leaving a few minutes to actually practice. He believed that you had to understand the meaning in the, and he taught what that meant through his passion and love of music, the universal language of mankind. While at Boggs, Dad served as dean of students, social studies instructor, organist, assistant superintendent and mentor for many students. He was affectionately known to the student body as "Hank", although no one would ever call him this to his face. The proudest moment for my Dad was when the Boggs choir was asked to perform at the 196th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA. The choir then made annual tours of Presbyterian churches on the east coast. Eventually the choir was featured on three long playing albums. Because of his dynamic direction and training, a select group from Boggs made a successful tour of Germany in 1975. Although he was not director at this time, he was instrumental in the selection of choir members.

On a more serious note, he was referred to as "a man for all seasons" by former students who have honored him both while living and posthumously. Dad was principal at Blakeney Junior High, Waynesboro; principal at Palmer Elementary in Keysville; & director of development, Claflin College, Orangeburg, S.C. He served as organist at John I. Blackburn and Belle Terrace Presbyterian Churches. He taught piano to many students across the CSRA. Following his retirement, his legacy continued with the Augusta Chorale, then called "the Augusta Community Choir" in 1983. Until his death in 1986, he was the Director, and his former students and other members of the community became key organizers.. One of his primary beliefs was that exposure to music of non-traditional genres was key to increasing knowledge and diversity within the community. He was a man of faith, a man of vision, a man of music.