

# Charleston Club Tattler

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## "Drum Major for Justice"

### Judge Richard Earl Fields - April 2020 Honoree

Meet Charleston's Judge Richard Earl Fields, Sr., the April 2020 honoree in the South Carolina Department of Education's 2020 South Carolina African American History Calendar. In six months Judge Fields will be celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday... that's right, October 1, 2020 he will become a centenarian another milestone for this uncommon



trailblazer. He has been described as a "lawyer's lawyer and a judge's judge." The Committee on Better Racial Assurance (COBRA) honored Judge Richard E. Fields, Sr. with its first *Drum Major for Justice Award* in February 2018.

Richard and his younger brother, Herbert were the sons of the late John and Mary Cook Fields. The family lived on St. Philip Street in Charleston. His parents were originally from the *Lady's Island* area located in Beaufort, SC. When the family moved to Charleston, both parents worked at Charleston's Union Station (Columbus St. at East Bay; destroyed by fire in early 1947), a large transport facility with rail trains, street trolleys, shops and stores. His father, John as a railroad porter and his mother, a shop worker in the complex in one of the shops in the complex.

When Judge Fields was born, it was the dawn of the Roaring Twenties. The Roaring Twenties was that period in history of dramatic social and political change. For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. The nation's total wealth more than doubled between 1920 and 1929, and this economic growth swept many Americans into an affluent but unfamiliar "consumer society."

Judge Fields received his early education in the city's public school system, and as he was completing his years at Simonton School (also known as the Morris Street School), he considered where he might go to high school. Avery Normal Institute was a first choice, but it was not cheap, \$3.50 a month. Richard and his father had to have "a talk," about "life!" He credits his father with steering him toward a path to success. When Fields wanted to drop out of middle school to join friends who were earning \$6 a week delivering for a nearby drugstore, his strict



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father stood his ground. "He said to me, 'Well, where are you going to live?' I said, 'Well, I'm going to live right here,'" Fields recalled. "He said, **No, you can't live here. You've become a man then.** If you'll be making \$6 a week and you're working, you don't need to live here. You can't live here then. Now if you're in school, you can live here." This wisdom was coming from a man who, unable to read or write, was considered during those times to be illiterate. At Avery, he graduated in the class of 1940 with Charleston Club connections; Charleston Club charter-member Julia Magwood Harris, the late Jametta White Martin, and Cynthia McCottry Smith. In June 2020 the Avery, Class of 1940 will be celebrating their 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

Fields took another giant step when he joined Centenary United Methodist Church in 1937, one of Charleston's oldest churches, where he mingled in the pews with principals and educators. (Historical Note: Centenary United Methodist Church was established by free blacks that had worshiped in the gallery of Trinity United Methodist Church before the Civil War. With the help of the American Missionary Association, they acquired the current building from the congregation of the Wentworth Street Baptist Church on April 10, 1866, with the required purchase price of \$20,000 **in gold**. Some of the gold had to be shipped from New York due to the lack of availability in Charleston.) Judge Fields served on the board of trustees of Centenary and served as the church's treasurer (c. 1950s) and maintained that position for over forty years.

Another turning point came when he enrolled at Avery Normal Institute, a secondary school for African-Americans run by a missionary group from New York, where college first emerged as a reality. "I had teachers who guided me," Fields said. "I got what I couldn't get at home. My mother and father were the most lovely people in the world, and they gave me (and younger brother, Herbert) everything they had, but they didn't have that to give to me. I got that at Avery Institute and Centenary United Methodist Church. That's where I got the vision, the spirit, the idea, because of the people I was able to meet." Otherwise, "**There would have been no Judge Fields,**" he reportedly said.

The confidence to "make it" was instilled in him years earlier when Fields as a teenager working shining shoes at Eddie Lewis' barber shop, overheard countless conversations between black barbers and their white clientele. "I began to see and understand that white people were just about like everybody else," Fields recalled. "Here I am at about 14 or 15 years old, being the recipient of all of these conversations, listening in the barber shop. Most black youth never had that kind of contact with white people."

There were so many moments like that, all of them combining to help set Fields on the path to success. West Virginia State College (University) was where he earned a B.S. Degree in Business Administration in 1944. It was there that he became a life-long member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., where he was inspired by the fraternity's motto... *“develops leaders, promotes brotherhood and academic excellence, while providing service and advocacy for our communities.”* In mid-1990s, West Virginia State University selected Judge Fields as “Alumni of the Year.” He enrolled in the Howard University Law School and graduated in 1947. In 1951, he married his beloved wife, the late Myrtle T. Evans (Avery). During their 57 year marriage, they became the parents of Mary Diane Fields-Reed (Michael) and Richard E. Fields, Jr.

Fields has been a pillar of the Charleston community since 1949, when he became the first black attorney since Reconstruction to open a law practice in the city. That began a series of firsts for the success-driven barrister. In 1969, he became a Charleston Municipal Court judge and six years later became a Charleston County Family Court judge. In 1980, Fields was elected a S.C. Circuit Court judge and served until his retirement in 1992. In 2004, he became the first recipient of the local chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates' award so named in his honor. Fields says, “Everywhere I went, there was somebody at the apex to advise me of where to go next.” He credits, among others, the late Joseph A. ‘Pop’ Moore, Gedney Howe, Sr. and Henry Smith as mentors.

The Avery Normal Institute closed in 1954, but its graduates carried on its legacy and tradition of community leadership and educational excellence. This was especially apparent in 1978 when Avery graduates organized the Avery Institute of Afro-American History and Culture, a community-based historical society.

What most people don't know or realize is that Richard Earl Fields, Sr. has been the consummate mentor for students of “The Law” for well over fifty years. The list of prominent (former) law students along the entire east coast (including Charleston) is staggering. Retired Judge Richard E. Fields has made his “mark” on numerous men and women throughout his years on this world. Webster says that mentoring... at its core, guarantees young people that there is someone who cares about them, assures them they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, and makes them feel like they matter. Research confirms that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on young people in a variety of personal, academic, and professional situations. Ultimately, mentoring connects a young person to personal growth and development, and social and economic opportunity. Yet one in three young people will grow up without this critical asset. The list of Judge Fields' mentees is long, which include: Judge Daniel E. Martin, Sr. (SC), Judge Daniel E. Martin, Jr. (SC), and Judge N. Denise Wilson-Taylor (DC). ***“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” - Mathew 4:19***

## Surgeon General Dr. Jerome M. Adams

Meet Dr. Jerome Michael Adams, he is the current and 20<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the United States. His mission as the “Nation's Doctor,” is to advance the health of the American people. Dr. Adams' motto as Surgeon General is “better health through better partnerships.” He is committed to strengthening relationships with all members of the health community, and forging new partnerships with members from the business, faith, education and public safety and national security communities. As the Surgeon General, Dr. Adams holds the rank of Vice Admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. In this capacity, (he is often seen on television) he oversees the operations of approximately 6,500 uniformed health officers who serve in nearly 800 locations around the world, promoting, protecting, and advancing the health and safety of our nation.



Dr. Jerome Adams' rise to the office of U.S. Surgeon General began in a rural town in Southern Maryland where even in high school he stood out among his peers as he racked up accolades and awards for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Adams' journey to becoming the "nation's doctor" began on one of the many tobacco farms that once drove the economy of his hometown of Mechanicsville in a rural, impoverished part of St. Mary's County.

Adams is the son of Richard and Edrena Adams of Mechanicsville, MD and grew up on the family farm. He attended Chopticon High School (Mechanicsville, MD), graduating in 1992, in the top 5 percent of his class. He then attended the University of Maryland Baltimore County through a full-tuition Meyerhoff Scholarship, a grant dedicated to minority students interested in the sciences. Adams received dual degrees; a B.S. in Biochemistry and his B.A. in Biopsychology. He attended medical school at Indiana University School of Medicine as an Eli Lilly Scholar. He also received a Master of Public Health from the University of California, Berkeley in 2000, with a focus on chronic disease prevention. Dr. Freeman A. Hrabowski III, president of UMBC, remembers when a young Adams interviewed for the scholars program. He was a kid from a small town competing with students from around the world, and he held his own! He called Adams a serious student who was focused and "hungry" to achieve academic success. Hrabowski said Adams showed a penchant for advocacy in his academic interests, particularly in health disparities in minority communities. "He was always concerned about other people, he always wanted to help others with the difficulties and challenges they faced."

Vice Admiral Jerome M. Adams is 45 years old, he and his wife Lacey have three children, Caden, Eli, and Millie. He was sworn in by Vice President Pence in Sept 2017, who appointed the anesthesiologist as Indiana's health commissioner in 2014 when he was the state's governor.

Because of Adams' work there on AIDS prevention, infant mortality and other health issues, Pence advocated for President Trump to nominate him as surgeon general.

### Rev. Joseph E. Lowery dead at age 98

Civil rights icon Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, a founding father of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) died Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at age 98 surrounded by his family at home. Lowery is known across the world as the founder of the SCLC, a civil rights organization he started with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Former Atlanta mayor Andrew Young, who was the director of the SCLC for nearly 30 years before becoming Atlanta's mayor, called Lowery a visionary leader and also one of the funniest people he knew. "Whenever we got together, we spent a hundred more times laughing than we did crying," Young said. "We were very seldom sad, even though there were many sad and tragic occasions. But by-in-large, we were filled with the spirit of brotherhood and love and wanting to make the world a better place." "The best way to honor Dr. Lowery is to continue to fight and work towards achieving the things that he cared about," Young said. "Racial equality was a big part of it, but also where we are with criminal justice reform, and all of the injustices that we see related to the disparities in our crime justice system."

Joseph Echols Lowery was born Oct. 6, 1921, in Huntsville, AL. As a child, people often told him that he was going to be a preacher, but he dreamed of studying law. After high school, he attended both Knoxville College and Alabama A&M College (University), before getting his undergraduate degree from Paine College in Augusta. In the mid-1940s, he moved to Birmingham where he edited the weekly "Birmingham Informer" to earn money for law school. Instead of law school, Lowery attended Payne Theological Seminary, Wayne State University, Garrett Theological Seminary and the Chicago Ecumenical Institute to study religion. In 1949, for \$21 a week, Lowery was appointed to his first church, East Thomas United Methodist, "out on the edge of the ghetto in Birmingham." "I couldn't preach then," he said. "But very politely they would say, 'I enjoyed your sermon.' I remember one lady said, 'Keep on trying, son.'"

An early supporter of the Montgomery bus boycott that started in Dec. 1955, Rev. Lowery organized a local—and more quickly successful—boycott of the buses in Mobile. That got Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s attention. Just a few years later, in 1957, he and King formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. With the SCLC, Lowery intensified his civil rights work, while he grew as a minister. In 1977, Lowery became the organization's president. "We believed in nonviolence. We believed in analysis and communication and negotiation," Lowery said. "And as a last resort, we believe in nonviolent direct action." Lowery

carried on King's dream, participating in peaceful protests around the country for justice and equality.

In 2008, Lowery played a prominent role in the election of President Barack Obama, as the country's first black president. Lowery endorsed Obama early in the campaign, and delivered a soul-stirring benediction at the historic inauguration. Among all the prestigious awards and degrees bestowed upon Lowery for his civil rights work, one of his proudest moments came when he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in August 2009 from President Obama. It is the highest honor given to a U.S. citizen and part of a remarkable journey for a man who often referred to himself as just a small town country preacher.

Aligning with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines on COVID-19 prevention and social distancing, plans are underway for a private family service. A public memorial will be held in late summer or early fall. Thank you, The Lowery Family."

### Two Local Legislators to Call It Quits



Two long serving Charleston County state legislators have announced they will retire upon completion of the current legislative session. Hollywood Rep. Robert Brown and North Charleston Rep. David Mack say they will not seek re-election this November. At the end of the session Brown will have served House Dist. 116, 20 years. Mack will have served House Dist. 109, 24 years. They will remain in office until January 2021 when newly elected representatives to the districts are installed. Brown first was elected to House Dist. 116 in 2000.

### The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Negro Leagues baseball

Minor League Baseball™ (MiLB™) recently announced in February its participation in the national celebration commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Negro Leagues baseball. In a joint effort between MiLB, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum (NLBM) and the Josh Gibson Foundation, MiLB will celebrate the impact of the Negro Leagues on the game of baseball and its contributions to society. The NLBM is spearheading the nationwide celebration, which begins today, and MiLB will support the celebration with activities extending into its ballparks and communities through fan engagement efforts. The goal of the partnership is to celebrate the contributions of African Americans to the sport's history, while engaging today's diverse fan base. The affiliation will extend beyond the 2020 season, as MiLB, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum and the Josh Gibson Foundation look to extend their reach to fans nationwide.



The Negro National League was founded on Feb. 13, 1920, in Kansas City, Missouri, by Baseball Hall of Famer Andrew "Rube" Foster and his fellow team owners.

The Negro National League and others like it operated for 40-plus years and gave black athletes and fans an outlet to safely play and watch baseball in a time of segregation, while creating countless opportunities for black-owned businesses. “Without the history and impact of the Negro Leagues, our game and our society would not be where it is today,” said Belicia Montgomery, MiLB’s director of diversity and inclusion. “From Jackie Robinson to Satchel Paige to Buck O’Neil, several of baseball’s most iconic players began their professional careers in the Negro Leagues and helped break down barriers. It’s important for us to recognize the significance that sports, and baseball specifically, played in the civil rights movement, and to not allow history to be forgotten.”

“The 100th anniversary of the birth of the Negro Leagues is one of the most significant occurrences not only in baseball history, but American history.” added Bob Kendrick, president of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. “Our partnership will introduce, and hopefully enlighten, fans to America’s unsung heroes who overcame tremendous social adversity to play baseball.” As part of its celebration of Black History Month and the 100th Anniversary of the Negro Leagues, Minor League Baseball has unveiled an alternate version of its logo to honor both events. MiLB’s prospect logo will consist of a design and color scheme intended to represent Black History Month and pay homage to African history and ancestry. The batterman icon within the logo is depicted in cream, a color often used in historic Negro Leagues team logos.

In addition to celebrating the Negro Leagues Centennial, MiLB is partnering with the NLBM and the Josh Gibson Foundation to facilitate educational tours, fundraisers, traveling exhibits and player appearances throughout MiLB ballparks this season. For more information about Minor League Baseball’s Diversity Initiative, visit [www.MiLB.com/about/diversity](http://www.MiLB.com/about/diversity).

### Charleston Club Tattler ~ One liners . . .

- ♦ The next **Charleston Club** meeting is scheduled for May, you will receive a notice via e-mail of the date and when it will occur or this meeting will be conducted via tele-conference. The March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting by tele-conference was very successful; we missed the repast (food & social), but it was GOOD!
- ♦ In May 1970, **Charles DeLesline Foster** became the first African American cadet to graduate from The Citadel. This May 2020, will mark the fifth anniversary of his graduation. One year later, the school hired its first black barber to groom cadets of color. That barber made an impromptu decision and changed the atmosphere of the barber shop at the military college forever. You might say, he "cut" his way into history. Born and raised in Kingstree in Williamsburg County, **Thad Miller** left home in the late 60's and headed to barber school at what is now Denmark Tech. In 1971 while working at a barber shop in downtown Charleston, a cadet came in

for a cut, and told Miller, they needed someone like him at The Citadel. Read his story in next month’s Tattler.

### In Memorial:

**Melvin Lee Cherry** the husband of Charleston Club member **Jeanette Hailey Cherry** died Friday, February 21<sup>st</sup> in Charlotte Hall, MD; he was 78 years old. “Cherry” as he was passionately called, was born in September 1941 in Dayton, TN to the late James Edward Cherry, Sr. and Wilma Armstrong Cherry. Melvin received his public education in the Tennessee School System, ultimately graduating from Carver High School in Dayton, TN. He also earned an Associate's Degree from Morristown College in Knoxville, TN. Melvin joined the U.S. Navy in 1966, where he served for four years and was honorably discharged in 1970. He had a career with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (METRO). Melvin enjoyed working for METRO, he started as a bus operator and held various positions during his tenure. He retired after 28-years as a Station Manager. Melvin was a 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason and was a member of Pythagoras Lodge No.9 and served faithfully for many years severing in numerous capacities.



Melvin was an avid Washington Redskins football fan, he loved watching wrestling, reading western novels, listening to music, and spending quality time with his family and friends. Melvin was a very loving and giving person throughout his life. He enjoyed his last years at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, an assisted living facility in Charlotte Hall, MD. The Veterans Home offered many activities at their location for residents and allowed him to maintain healthy lifestyles with other Redskins peers!

Memorial Services, Celebrating the Life of Melvin Lee Cherry were held on March 12<sup>th</sup> at First Baptist Church of Marshall Heights in S.E. Washington, DC with the Rev. Dr. Andre D. Ivy, Pastor presiding. Melvin is survived by his loving and devoted wife, **Jeanette Hailey Cherry**; daughters, Krystal C. Cherry of District Heights, MD and Pamela Denise Thompson of Jefferson City, TN; son, Melvin Keith Cherry of Bowie, MD. And a host of other relatives and friends. *“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heaven. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.”* Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 (NIV)

## Happy Birthdays!

### April 2020 Birthdays:

**Michelle Gaston** - April 3<sup>th</sup> ~ **Vanessa Tabern** - April 4<sup>th</sup> ~  
**Emmett Russell** - April 8<sup>th</sup> ~ **Jack Rogers** - April 14<sup>th</sup> ~  
**Clarence McNeill** - April 23<sup>rd</sup> ~ **Alethia Starke** - April 27<sup>th</sup>  
 ~ **Lamar Haynes** - Apr. 30<sup>th</sup>. ~ *The Fly on The Wall I*