

History-maker returns to Wise

Miriam Morris Fuller was the first African-American student to attend classes at what was then Clinch Valley College. Segregation was still law in Virginia at the time Fuller enrolled and was accepted at the College.

“The fact I attended here in 1960 was next to a miracle in those times,” Fuller told the large audience assembled for her lecture held in the Chapel of All Faiths on Sept. 20. Fuller credited then Chancellor Joseph Smiddy and business instructor Emma McCrary for their courage in admitting her to the College.

Fuller was already a college graduate working as a librarian at the black high school in Appalachia when she enrolled in business classes at CVC. She’d been selected to teach business courses to students there and wanted to become a certified instructor.

“Because CVC accepted me as a student, I was able to become a certified teacher of typing and shorthand at Bland High School,” Fuller said. “This in turn represented an opportunity for many young ladies.” Many of Fuller’s students completed their coursework at Bland, then went to Washington, D.C. to work at the Pentagon and the Department of Labor.

A native of Big Stone Gap, Fuller earned a bachelor’s degree in library science from Virginia State University. She went on to earn a master’s degree in library science from the University of Illinois and a doctoral degree in education from the University of Missouri at Columbia. After leaving Appalachia, Fuller worked at Leal School in



Urbana, Ill., and Thomas Jefferson Library in Jefferson City, Mo. She worked as an instructor and administrator at the University of Illinois in Urbana and the University of Missouri at Columbia.

She is a researcher and author who has published numerous scholarly articles and several children’s books. Her long list of honors and awards includes the Outstanding Minority Business Owner Award, Woman of Achievement Award, Outstanding Christian Women Award, and Mother of the Year. Virginia State University recognized her with the Shields Howard Creative Writing Award for Poetry.

The mother of three grown children, Mrs. Fuller lives with her husband in Jefferson City, Mo.



FIFTY YEARS OF HISTORY - On Sept. 20, 2004, exactly 50 years to the day after classes were first held at the College, students, faculty, staff, and community leaders gathered to unveil a state historical marker. Located near Smiddy Hall, the marker text, shown at right, provides a brief history of UVa-Wise. Pictured are: Carol Sue Gilbert '56, president of the Alumni Association; Del. Clarence "Bud" Phillips '74; Jennifer Davis '05, president of the Student Government Association; Don R. Pippin '58, a member of the U.Va. Board of Visitors and the UVa-Wise Board; Chancellor Ernie Ern; Don M. Green '61, a member of the UVa-Wise Board; Chancellor Emeritus Joseph C. Smiddy; Senator William Wampler, Jr.; and James M. Gott '72, chair of the UVa-Wise Board

Historical Marker Dedicated

“The college was founded in 1954 as Clinch Valley College of the University of Virginia, through the efforts of local citizens and University of Virginia officials including President Colgate W. Darden, Jr.; Samuel R. Crockett, extension services director in Southwest Virginia; and George Zehmer, director of the extension division. Located on the former Wise County Poor Farm, the college began as a two-year co-educational branch of the University of Virginia. In 1970, Clinch Valley College awarded its first bachelor’s degrees. In 1999, it became The University of Virginia’s College at Wise. It is a nationally recognized, public, liberal arts college.”