Welcome Back to Educator's Edge!

Historic Columbia (HC) continues to bring history to your classroom. In this winter edition of Educator’s Edge, you will be introduced to resources to help with lesson planning for upcoming curriculum units—Black History Month, Civil Rights (Grade 5), and Reconstruction (Grade 4).

Visit Historic Columbia and tour a house with your class. historiccolumbia.org/field-trips.

Book Historic Columbia educators for a Traveling Trunk Lesson! historiccolumbia.org/travelingtrunks. Traveling Trunks are sponsored in part by:

ABOUT HISTORIC COLUMBIA
Historic Columbia (HC) preserves places and shares complex stories from the past that connect us in the present and inspire our future.

IN THIS ISSUE
1. Welcome Back!
2. Meet Beth Johnson
3. Before Rosa Parks: Sarah Mae Flemming
4. Upcoming Events
5. The More You Know

CONTACT US
1601 Richland Street
Columbia, SC 29201
historiccolumbia.org
education@historiccolumbia.org
(803) 252-1770 ext. 26

Historic Columbia Educator News | 1
HISTORICCOLUMBIA.ORG/EDUCATION

The More You Know: RESOURCES FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Reconstruction 360 is a project of South Carolina ETV that allows students to explore aspects of Reconstruction in a 360-degree environment with short documentary films. The site contains lesson plans and primary documents for further educator support. Learn more at reconstruction360.org.

Columbia City of Women is a great resource for local women’s history. The nominees include suffragists, doctors and health workers, Civil Rights activists, attorneys, educators, and more, all who have dedicated their work to change Columbia for the better. Learn more at columbiacityofwomen.com.

The Center for Civil Rights History and Research is a joint initiative of the College of Arts and Sciences and the University Libraries at the University of South Carolina. Their website includes lesson plans, podcasts, videos, online site tours, as well as other digital resources. Learn more at civilrights.sc.edu.

My Life in the South by Jacob Stroyer, available at Project Gutenberg, is a memoir of Stroyer’s life as an enslaved child living at Kensington Plantation in Eastover. It is a quick read for the educator and an opportunity to highlight the voice of a Black youth living during the antebellum era. Learn more at gutenberg.org/ebooks/15096.

South Carolina Digital Library has made thousands of plantation records, historic photographs, and oral histories available for use as primary source materials via their website. Learn more at scmemory.org/topics/african-americans.

Meet Beth Johnson

Beth joined HC’s education team in September 2023 after retiring as a South Carolina public school classroom teacher. She enjoys sharing her enthusiasm for history with students throughout the Midlands.

When Beth isn’t immersed in traveling trunks or field studies, she is gardening, cooking, quilting, or out exploring South Carolina’s state parks.
You’ve heard of Rosa Parks, but have you heard of Sarah Mae Flemming? Read the story behind Flemming v. SCE&G, recognized as the case that paved the way for Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Sarah Mae Flemming Brown (1933-1993)

On June 22, 1954, Sarah Mae Flemming walked from her home at 1107 Page Street in Columbia and boarded a bus operated by the South Carolina Electric & Gas Company (SCE&G) at the intersection of Main and Taylor streets, a routine she followed every weekday morning on her way to work. Flemming, just four days shy of her twenty-first birthday, worked as a maid for a white family in one of Columbia’s affluent suburbs. Despite the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling Brown v. Board of Education the previous month, which declared “separate but equal” schools unconstitutional, South Carolina’s public spaces remained rigidly segregated. The placement of the color line on SCE&G’s buses, which shifted with the number of Black and white riders, was enforced by the drivers, who were legally vested with the powers of a deputy sheriff.

That morning, Flemming took the seat of a white woman who was exiting the bus. To her left were two African American women and several white women sat closer to the front. According to Flemming’s testimony two years later, the driver, Warren H. Christmus, told her, “Can’t you wait until someone gets off the bus before you sit down? Get up. And I mean right now.” In his defense at trial, Christmus explained that she was sitting in front of two white people.

Embarrassed, Flemming pulled the cord for the next stop, located at Main and Washington streets, despite it being more than two miles from her employers’ home. According to Flemming, Christmus blocked her from exiting the front door of the bus with a punch, forcing her back down the aisle to the rear door. She returned home and then to the hospital, where she was examined and released. Although she chose not to mention the incident to her family until the following week, Modjeska Monteith Simkins, state director of the NAACP, visited her and encouraged her to press the matter. Simkins called it “another unwarranted invasion of state and municipal rights,” and the leaders of the Citizens Councils of South Carolina claimed the ruling was “dictatorial and unconstitutional.” Flemming, speaking to the Associated Press, offered two sentiments: “It was the right thing to do,” and “I only hope it won’t lead to trouble.” (The State, April 25, 1956)

On February 16, 1955, Judge George Bell Timmerman dismissed the case on the grounds that while “separate but equal” school facilities had been ruled unconstitutional, the statute allowing for “separate facilities for the races in defendant’s busses” had not. In coordination with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDEF), led by Thurgood Marshall, local attorneys Matthew J. Perry and Lincoln C. Jenkins joined Wittenberg for the appeal heard by the US Fourth Circuit Court on June 21, 1955. That court overruled Timmerman on July 14, “noting the old doctrine that separate but equal facilities for Negroes are constitutional can no longer be ‘regarded as a correct statement of the law.’” (The State, August 2, 1955). The Chicago Defender touted the ruling two weeks later with the headline, “Court Bans Segregation on City Buses in Dixie.”

By then, Timmerman’s son, George Bell Timmerman, Jr., had been elected and installed as the 105th governor of South Carolina. Governor Timmerman, SC Attorney General T.C. Callison, and Mayor J. Clarence Dreher, Jr., pledged to aid SCE&G in bringing the appeal to the Supreme Court. The highest court dismissed the appeal as frivolous on April 23, 1956, leaving most observers sure that the ban on segregation on intrastate buses was deemed unconstitutional. Callison called it “another unwarranted invasion of state and municipal rights,” and the leaders of the Citizens Councils of South Carolina had reacted by filing an appeal. On May 26, 1956, sent the case back to Timmerman. The final trial, in which Matthew J. Perry joined Jenkins for the plaintiff, proceeded to jury deliberations on June 11, 1957. After 30 minutes, they decided SCE&G still owed Sarah Mae Flemming Brown nothing.

Brown and her husband lived the rest of their lives in Eastover, raising three children: John Earl, Wanda, and Bruce. She died in 1993 at the age of 59, having never spoken publicly about her role in ending segregated travel accommodations.

**Essay from Columbia City of Women, a project of Historic Columbia. Visit columbiacityofwomen.org to read more about the women who have transformed Columbia, and book a Civil Rights Traveling Trunk to learn about other local changemakers.**