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**Memorial wall unveiled at Eddie Buie Park;
*Ernest A. Haile Jr. Memorialized***



The Ernest A. Haile Jr. Memorial Wall has spaces available for more etched bricks.
Photo by Jeff M. Hardison © May 30, 2020 at 9:10 p.m.
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The Ernest A. Haile Memorial Wall Committee stand in front of the wall to memorialize Ernest Albert Haile Jr. Committee members are (from left) Treasurer Robert Williams, Chair Alice Monyei, Vice Chair Johnnie Phillips and Second Treasurer Jerry Battles.

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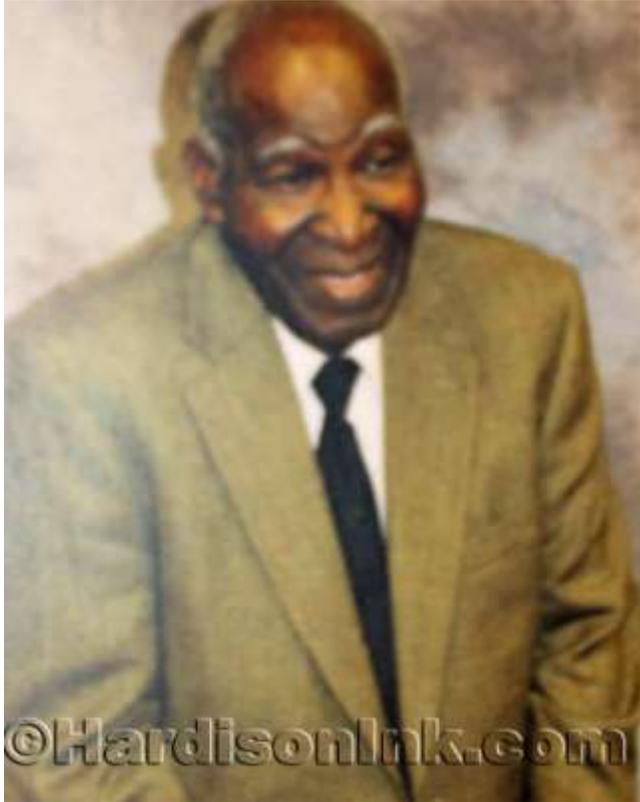
Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 30, 2020 at 9:10 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- Ernest Albert Haile Jr. (Nov. 16, 1922 -March 7, 2014) was 91 when he died six years ago, but his mark on Chiefland and Levy County perseveres.

Haile's influence carries forward in the hearts, minds and souls of many of those whom he touched.

A native of Valdosta, Georgia, Ernest Haile moved to Chiefland in 1957. He influenced lives in a positive manner as an educator and as a leader in the Chiefland community.



This is a 2012 photo of Ernest A. Haile Jr. taken from the church directory of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, where he attended worship and where his funeral service was held in 2014.

The Ernest A. Haile Memorial Wall Committee is seen here with Mr. Haile's son. Everyone is wearing facemasks to reflect this time in history – during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. They are (from left) Treasurer Robert Williams, Chair Alice Monyei, Malcolm Haile Sr., Vice Chair Johnnie Phillips and Second Treasurer Jerry Battles.



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Haile was a veteran of World War II, where he served in the United States Army.

Haile was principal of Chiefland Elementary and Junior High School (CJHS) from 1957 to 1964, where he influenced children who were students, as well as affecting in an affirmative manner their parents and other family members, and likewise having a constructive impact on adult faculty and staff coworkers.

CJHS was for black students only, because back then segregation existed in America's public schools.

After CJHS burned down, Haile moved on in his professional career and became vice principal of Chiefland High School, where he continued to inspire more generations of students, parents, other school administrators, faculty members and CHS staff by practicing what he preached. Truly a Christian man, Haile helped guide the people in his life through instruction, at times through discipline and always with love.

The Ernest A. Haile Memorial Wall Committee led to the construction of the memorial wall to permanently celebrate the legacy of Ernest A. Haile. A bench is planned for addition at the site later.

During the past year of its existence, the committee went through some iterations, which resulted in the final four-member core.

That final committee is comprised of Chair Alice Monyei, Vice Chair Johnnie Phillips, Robert Williams, all of Chiefland and Jerry Battles of Gainesville.



Ernest Haile's son Malcolm Haile Sr.

Also attending the event on Saturday was Ernest Haile's son Malcolm Haile Sr., 62, of Tampa.

The unveiling on May 30 was in keeping with a tradition at Eddie Buie Park, where the old CJHS once stood. The Chiefland Men's Club call this annual celebration the Chiefland May Day Extravaganza.

For instance, The 29th Annual May Day Extravaganza, sponsored by the Chiefland

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Men's Club, was on Saturday, May 26, 2012, from noon to 6 p.m. at Buie Park.

While this event on Saturday would have been the 37th Annual Chiefland May Day Extravaganza, like the Chiefland Watermelon Festival and so many other events this year, it did not happen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Large gatherings probably would have been “super spreader” events that would have multiplied the fatalities even beyond the 100,000-plus deaths of Americans so far.

There was no festive gathering at Eddie Buie Park on Saturday, but the committee and Mr. Haile’s son were there to share their thoughts and feelings.



Bennie Goldwire works on final preparation of the memorial wall he built.

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Bennie Goldwire pauses for a moment as he works on final preparation of the memorial wall he built.



This plaque shows the people who led the effort to make the memorial come into existence.

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The memorial wall stands ready to be seen by everyone. Eddie Buie Park, though, like all of the parks in Chiefland remains closed for now to reduce the odds of spreading COVID-19.

Before they arrived, the builder of the memorial – Bennie Goldwire, 39, of Chiefland was washing and scrubbing the structure. He arrived at 7 a.m. and finished his task a bit past 9 a.m., with the unveiling happening -- just as Chair Monyei had planned -- at 9:30 a.m. on May 30.

The Annual Chiefland May Day Extravaganza is held on the last Saturday in May. This year, that event would have coincided with what used to be the traditional Memorial Day in the United States of America.

Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States for remembering the people who died in battle or from wounds suffered in battle while serving in the country's armed forces. The holiday, which is currently observed every year on the last Monday of May, was held on May 30 from 1868 to 1971.

Before the committee arrived, Goldwire, who is a member of the CHS Graduating Class of 1999, shared with *HardisonInk.com* some of his experiences related to Haile.

Jay Young had been the masonry professional first planned by the committee to construct the memorial.

Goldwire said when Young passed away, he was asked to perform the job and he felt honored to complete it. Young was Goldwire's mentor and taught him about masonry and bricklaying, Goldwire said. Goldwire said his mother had passed away when he was 15 years old and Young had raised him as his own after that.

When Goldwire was 19 or 20 years old, he said, he used to mow Haile's lawn. Haile gave him an old Snapper mower, upon which Haile had just recently replaced the original engine with a new engine. The gift of the mower was because Goldwire had replaced some wood with bricks on a shed for Haile, Goldwire said.

Those bricks would last much longer than the wood, which was starting to rot, Goldwire said.

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And just as the bricks would last – so, too, did the engine on the mower given to Goldwire by Haile. It is lasting even today. Goldwire had put that engine on another mower body. And that engine will crank up after one pull today – 20 years later, Goldwire said.

Goldwire left the site at Eddie Buie Park just after the committee members started arriving on Saturday morning.

Committee members and Malcolm Haile Sr. each spoke at the soft unveiling for the memorial wall. Williams gave the closing prayer. A bigger opening may occur in September, depending on how the pandemic causes people to meet or not meet in large gatherings in the near future.

ALICE MONYEI

Alice Monyei said this project has been on her heart to complete since a short time after Ernest A. Haile Jr. passed away.

She asked many hardworking people who she knew to join the committee, and there were quite a few at first. That became a group of seven, she said. Then “the cream of crop rose to the top” and the final four committee members saw the project to the point where it could be unveiled on May 30 as Monyei had hoped. It was a yearlong project.

There are still bricks available for people to have engraved messages added to the wall.

As Monyei opened the time when committee and family members could speak, she choked up a bit, obviously still emotionally affected by the project, which she felt moved to bring to fruition.

She said Haile and her father were close friends. The two families were very close with each other, Monyei said. When she was at Chiefland High School, Monyei said she admired Haile for his ability to guide students – even during the difficult situations from racial integration in public schools, where Haile was bringing people together.

JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Committee Vice Chair Phillips said Haile was her principal as well.

“He came to Chiefland Junior High when I was in third grade (in 1957),” Phillips said. “He nicknamed me ‘Little Ugly’ because he told me that I thought I was cute. So, he was gonna’ call me ‘Little Ugly.’”

Subsequently, Phillips let Haile know that her name for him was “Big Ugly.”

After students went from CJHS to Williston Vocational High School, before integration when that was the high school for blacks, Haile would continue to watch their progress.

“He came to the house one day,” Phillips said, “because I made a ‘C,’ and he came to let me know how disappointed he was, because it was the first time I had ever made a ‘C’ in any class.”

Phillips asked Haile how he knew.

Haile told her that he had the principal at WVHS keep him informed about the progress of all former CJHS students. This demonstrated the level of care he had for students, even after they left his tutelage.

“And he gave me my first job with the Levy County School Board,” Phillips said. “He hired me as a teacher’s aide.”

Phillips said she became Haile’s friends after she completed school. While she was a

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student, however, “He let us know that he was the boss, and it was his way; but I respected him for that.”

When Monyei called on Phillips to ask if she would help with this project, Phillips said her response was “of course.”

Phillips said she is honored to be part of this committee, and to help the community. “I love each and every one of my committee members,” Phillips said.



Robert Williams (left) and Malcolm Haile Sr. stand at the memorial. The two men said they feel as if they are brothers.

ROBERT WILLIAMS

Robert Williams is treasurer of the committee. He said he felt it is a privilege and an honor to be part of the committee.

When Monyei called him last year to participate, he paused for a moment because he had some mixed feelings about it at first.

Williams said that when he moved to Chiefland in 1996, he gave Haile the nickname of “Poppy” because Haile was the father that Williams did not have when he was growing up.

“I was able to be to him (Haile), what I had wanted to be for my father,” Williams said.

When Williams came to Chiefland, he said, it was because the government needed him to clean up some housing issues – in the housing project right across the street from Eddie Buie Park.

Williams said he was approached by a drug pusher to buy drugs, right on Buie Park

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Road in 1996.

“Poppy and Mrs. (Julia) Haile guided me,” Williams said, “and they told me about the potholes.”

Williams said he is thankful to all of the people who have contributed to the memorial by purchasing engraved bricks, and he is thankful for the people who will contribute to it in the future because there are still blank bricks that can be replaced with engraved bricks.

Williams said that by being a committee member he feels he has inherited a brother in Malcolm Haile Sr., as he considers the late Ernest Haile Jr. as his father and his godfather.

Williams said he thanks God for having this brother. He thanks God for being able to complete the project, and he is proud of what the committee accomplished with the support of donors.

There is a plan to put a bench in front of the wall for people to sit and reflect, Williams said, adding that he hopes this memorial helps bring the community together.

JERRY BATTLES

Jerry Battles is the second treasurer for the committee. Battles, who retired from the Florida Department of Corrections after being in that aspect of law enforcement for 28 years, comes from a family of educators.

Battles grew up in Chiefland. His grandmother the late Jessie Battles taught for 33 years in Levy County, and his mother taught in Marion County for 38 years.

Mr. Haile was “part of the village” that raised him, Battles said, referring to the axiom that it takes a village to raise a child.

With his mother and grandmother as teachers, Battles knew that he could not “get away with anything.” He saw Mr. Haile as being “really strict.”

Haile was always positive and encouraging students to look at college, even long before that would be a consideration, Battles said.

“He was the first person to give me a paddling in school,” the retired corrections officer said. “And after the paddling, he wanted me to stay in his office and talk. We talked about sports and all that.

“And I was thinking ‘This man just got through paddling me.’ So, I ended up being his aide in his office for a while,” Battles continued. “I really appreciate the opportunity to be part of this committee.”

Battles said he is glad to have known Haile, and for all the encouragement he received from Haile.

MALCOLM HAILE SR.

Malcolm Haile Sr., who works for the Internal Revenue Service at the Tampa Office, said he is thankful to the committee for its work on this project to honor his father.

“It means a great deal to me,” he added.

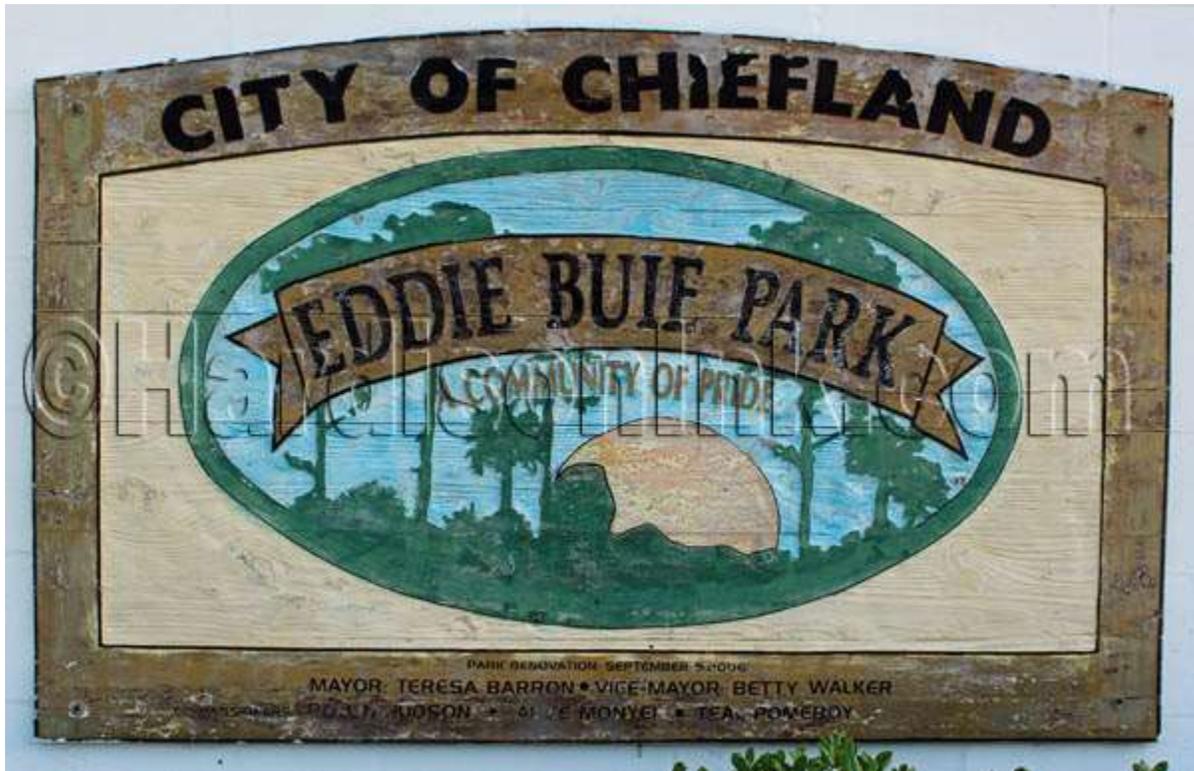
Haile is proud of his father.

“I’m sure if he could see this today,” Haile continued, “I’m sure he would be proud of this memorial and each of you. I did gain a brother (Williams) out of this. And I am so thankful for that. And it is so good to know that my father was so well loved in his community. Thank you.”

Before Williams gave the benediction and a closing prayer, Monyei shared her

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perspective of how working with this committee brought her more insight and understanding about its members, who she knew to some degree before.



This sign at Eddie Buie Park shows the renovation was completed on Sept. 9, 2006, when the Chiefland City Commission was comprised of Mayor Teresa Barron, Vice Mayor Betty Walker, and city commissioners Rollin Hudson, Alice Monyei and Teal Pomeroy. Some of the letters are deteriorating on the sign now.