

# The Shelby Star

## New book recognizes the history of county's black schools (with video)

### **Ezra Bridges, 103, oversaw committee**

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[Rebecca Clark](#)

SHELBY - Ezra Bridges remembers the days when she worked as a servant in the home of Gov. O. Max Gardner and when blacks attended school in a cemetery. Bridges, 103, has been a vital part in preserving Cleveland County's past and was a key figure in compiling the history of the county's black schools.

Along with a committee, Bridges, a retired educator, worked for many years putting together a book that detailed black schools from their start in Sunset Cemetery, through desegregation. Bridges was presented Tuesday with the first finished copy of the book at Cleveland Pines where she resides. The book is the first in a four-part series detailing the history of Cleveland County schools.

"I learned from the history of black schools that there was a very good solid beginning from black people," she said. She said the black community recognized the need for education. Bridges remembers working as a servant in the home of O. Max Gardner. "One morning," she said, "I heard Gov. Gardner coming down the staircase." She said he asked her where the other servants were and then told her he planned to donate some land for a new school site adjacent to his property. That school, no longer standing, makes up just part of what's profiled in the book series. Gardner also donated land for the first black cemetery and ended up paying the full tuition and fees for Ezra to attend and graduate from Columbia University. "The Governor believed that education was the key for blacks to move beyond segregation and the lack of equal treatment," said Bridges.

Bridges said it was a pleasure to work on the project. "We know now our education history and its background," she said. When presented with a copy of the book, she said she was pleased with the results of her committee's work. "I'm so happy," she said. "We've never had anything like this done."

The 123-page black history book will be offered for sale at Cleveland Memorial Library today from 2 to 5 p.m., at Spangler Memorial Library in Lawndale from 2 to 5 p.m. and at Spangler Thursday from 3 to 6 p.m. If you have any other questions, contact Cothenia Jolley at 704-434-2498, Sybil Dixon at 704-538-7155 or C.A. Allison at 704-739-3441.