



**VIRGINIA'S BLIND:
FROM CUSTODIALISM TOWARD FREEDOM THROUGH
THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

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Edited by Charles and Jacqueline Brown

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In April of 1958, the blind of Virginia had little opportunity and choices were limited, particularly for those blind Virginians who needed services from the Virginia Commission for the Blind. In 1958, the Commission had only seen its second head, Douglas McFarland. Dr. McFarland had become Commissioner in 1956 when L. L. Watts retired after 24 years as head of the Commission.

Lucian Louis Watts, blinded in a dynamite explosion when he was 25, enrolled at the Staunton School for the deaf and Blind in October, 1914, graduating in June, 1917. Following his graduation, he supervised the blind boys at the Staunton school. In June of 1919, he, along with Randolph Latimer of Maryland and H. M. McManaway, Superintendent of the Virginia School for the Blind in Staunton, organized the Virginia Chapter of the American Association of Workers for the Blind (AAWB) with Watts elected its first President. This organizing was done the same month the House of Representatives in Washington, D. C. passed the Women's Suffrage Act. The first nonstop transatlantic airplane flight was completed, the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I was signed, and Harry Truman married Elizabeth Virginia Wallace (Bessie).

The AAWB formed a three person committee to study "the plight of the blind" as a result of legislation pushed by Herbert Taylor, who was in the General Assembly and a friend of Watts. The Commission consisted of Watts, Latimer of Maryland and McManaway from the Staunton school. In 1922 the recommendations of that study resulted in the establishment of the Virginia Commission for the Blind with Watts its Executive Secretary and Herbert Taylor heading its seven-member board. This was the same year Babe Ruth signed a three year contract with the New York Yankees for \$52,000 per year, the first airplane landed at the US Capitol in Washington DC, the first radio was turned on at the White House, Airship Rome exploded at Hampton Roads Virginia--34 died, and the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the 19th Amendment--Women's Right to Vote.

The Virginia Commission for the Blind, while established in 1922, became permanent in 1925. Also, it was 1925 that L. L. Watts was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates, representing Albemarle County. He served in the General Assembly from 1926 to 1934. During this period he was also Executive Secretary of the Virginia Commission for the Blind and Treasurer of the AAWB in Virginia. Correspondence found in the L. L. Watts papers at the VCU James Branch Cabell Library show that the Virginia Attorney General advised that there was no conflict of interest. There were other legislators holding jobs with the Virginia government. Watts had, according to his correspondence, become known outside Virginia. Walter G. Holmes, first editor of the Matilda Ziegler Magazine, one of the only Braille magazines available at that time, wrote to Watts congratulating him on his election to the General Assembly.

Before the Commission for the Blind was established, there were no services for Virginia's blind citizens after they graduated from high school. White blind Virginians were educated at the School for the Blind and Deaf in Staunton which opened to the blind in 1839. "Colored" blind Virginians attended school in Newport News, at a school established in 1908 (later moved to Hampton, Virginia). Following graduation, blind Virginians went home to their families. Few got jobs, few married and even fewer owned property. In 1922 the government offered no welfare programs. Blind people had to depend on their family for food and shelter.

Watts believed that blind men could do industrial work such as making brooms and mattresses, and caning chairs. He and his colleagues at the AAWB set out to establish a training school in Charlottesville. AAWB purchased the land on Monticello Street and raised private funds to build the industrial plant. The Charlottesville training school opened its doors in 1930. The land and the building were deeded to the Virginia Commission for the Blind (VCB) in 1935. This training school offered blind men training in how to make brooms, cane chairs and produce mattresses. These goods were then made and sold from the Charlottesville facility. The idea that the blind were limited to such employment was quite common in the first half of the 20th century. When the industrial shops were established, the nation was suffering a great depression. Jobs for all were at a premium, and the government was revising its policies to help stir employment and *liaise faire* was being supplemented with public assistance. Blind people benefited from this change in public policy.

Blind women were taught to make baskets, knit, crochet and do some light sowing. Women worked from their homes and all goods produced were sold by VCB with the blind worker receiving a small percentage of the money the Commission took in.

AAWB and the Virginia Commission during the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's and into the 1950's worked so closely together that it was difficult to tell which was which. AAWB funded training programs for blind women, funding girls' training for craft making, etc. The AAWB also purchased the 3003 Park Avenue building in which the Commission was housed from 1935 until it moved to its current location on Azalea Avenue in the 1970's.

The Commission's first address was at 605 National Bank Building, Richmond. It then used a 1224 W. Broad Street address. During the 1930's, work shops were opened in Roanoke, Norfolk, Richmond and Winchester. In addition to the involvement of the Virginia AAWB, Watts solicited support from District 24 of the Lions, asking them to fund his programs.

Watts' influence grew during the 1920's and '30s. In addition to seeing that the Charlottesville workshop was established, Watts planned for a school to be located there also. His work resulted in an appropriation from the General Assembly to purchase property and study the idea of moving the Staunton School for the Blind to Charlottesville. Watts' Correspondence also indicates that Watts expected to head that school.

By 1940 the Commission, in partnership with the AAWB, was strong and held to be the most influential entity in the lives of blind Virginians. In addition to being Virginia's employer of the blind, the commission also became the agency in charge of Aid to the blind. With the enactment of the social security program in 1937, blind Americans were to receive a stipend. This aid for the blind in Virginia was administered by the Virginia Commission for the Blind as directed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1938.

A pamphlet authored by John Cunningham, a close friend of Watts, was published by the Commission in 1940. The introduction to the pamphlet states:

"The purpose of this booklet is to set forth briefly, but concretely and in layman's language, the projects, the achievements, and the aims of the Commission. Moreover, the friends of the Commission have long felt that the true story of Mr. Watts and his work for the blind of Virginia forms one of the thrilling chapters in the history of social services in the Old Dominion or indeed in the whole American scene."

The pamphlet outlines the Commission's work in 1940 as:

"The workshop in Charlottesville is the Commission's nucleus for training blind men. For the training and employment of blind women, the Commission's nucleus is its training school

at 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, under the direction of Miss Margaret Hogan, supervisor of home teaching. Miss Hogan, herself blind, is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, and came to her present work in Virginia following some years of experience in home teaching of the blind in New Jersey.

At the Richmond center the blind women and girls are taught rug weaving, knitting and crocheting, chair caning, and such other handicrafts as are adaptable to feminine 'hands in the dark.' Braille is taught to adults who have not attended a school for blind children. On average there are fifteen women and girls being trained or employed at this center. When a girl has completed her training (six months is the average training period) she may leave the center and ply her new handicrafts in her home. The Commission undertakes to market for her saleable, or a regular job may be found for her by the Commission's placement agent. One girl has been so placed as a stenographer in a Richmond office; one is operating a news-stand in the Richmond Post Office. Several girls trained at the Richmond center are now employed in workrooms for blind girls in other states. Several of the girls, on completion of their training, are kept at the center and employed in making articles which the Commission sells.

The marketing of these goods is done through special sales strategically placed, dated, advertised, and "staffed" by the Commission. When held in small communities the sale is usually under a local sponsorship, as of some church or parent-teachers group. Notable among these sales is the Commission's annual Christmas sale at 102 North Sixth Street, Richmond, of goods made by the blind. Ladies of Richmond, regardless of church affiliation, have been most helpful in conduct of these sales, especially the committee from the Council of Jewish Women. "What can blind women make that people will buy and use?"

According to the 1940 pamphlet, the Commission, operated workshops for blind men in Charlottesville and for blind women in Richmond, had adopted the federal Randolph-Sheppard Program by establishing newsstands in post offices and other public buildings, and, Watts, along with his AAWB colleagues, developed a private "cantine" program in which blind persons handled filling the candy machines and collecting funds from the candy-dispensers. All administrative paperwork was handled, according to the booklet, in Richmond. Thus, by 1940, the Virginia Commission for the Blind was well-established and, in

partnership with AAWB's private canteens, employing blind persons. A few blind women were employed outside the Commission as stenographers, who used dictating equipment. Also, there were some blind employees hired by Watts who worked at the Commission's main phone or as home teachers. However, most of the employed blind worked either in the industries or in Watts' canteens. Blind men were primarily employed as industrial workers making brooms, mattress ticking and caning chairs either in Charlottesville or in their own homes.

Blind White men worked in Charlottesville and in their homes. White women worked at the women's industrial shop at the 3003 Parkwood Avenue site. Negroes (colored blind) were trained separately. Watts' papers and the 1940 Commission Pamphlet indicate there was a small industrial shop for colored workers in the Tidewater area and talk of establishing a colored shop similar to that in Charlottesville. Serious plans were made and carried out by the late 1940's or early 1950's with the establishment of the Richmond shop located outside of the Agency's Parkwood Avenue location.

While Watts enjoyed praise for his work with the blind and little to no criticism as he grew and strengthened his position with the Virginia Commission for the Blind, there is some evidence that he, like all public officials, had colleagues who didn't praise him. There is evidence that Watts and McManaway, once colleagues, apparently parted ways. The Watts Papers make reference to an investigation of the Staunton School in the late 1920's, resulting in Watts writing that McManaway was not fit to continue as Superintendent. Apparently there was some conflict about how the Staunton school's space was used. Indications are that, according to Watts, the school for the deaf received far more room than the blind school. According to some correspondence, many teachers and widowers were living at the school. Only three beds were available for additional blind students. Watts wrote that he received names of 50 students who should have been, but were not enrolled in the Staunton school. These students were from Southwestern Virginia and Winchester. He referred to the "overcrowding" of the blind school as a justification for his idea of moving the blind to a new school in Charlottesville—which was designed using the cottage system, after the school for the Blind in Maryland.

While the General Assembly did appropriate funds to study moving the school for the blind to Charlottesville, and also purchased property, Watts' idea did not materialize. By the 1940's his files are silent with regard to relocating the school. He raised the issue again following the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools. In several letters he suggested that the white and the colored schools be consolidated in Charlottesville. Also, he suggested that the school's board be under the control of the Virginia Commission for the Blind.

Watts failed to realize his ambitions as they related to the schools. However, his success at building and running the Commission for the blind won him high praise and a reputation among his colleagues as Virginia's answer for helping the blind. The blind, however, felt just the opposite. His single-handed one-stop resource approach for blind Virginians that brought Watts praise from his colleagues brought him a reputation as a dictatorial tyrant from the blind. The blind felt that they were serving Watts instead of the Commission meeting their needs. By the mid 1940's blind Virginians were becoming frustrated with the Commission's "hold "on their lives.

In 1945 Charlottesville shop workers called for an investigation of administrative practices at the Commission. According to newspaper articles, blind workers reported that there was no vocational training at the Charlottesville shop, and that they were expected to become Commission industrial workers. They said that there were no safety precautions on machines as the belts were open and workers were often injured. The workers also stated that there was no workmen's compensation for those injured on the job, work hours were not steady, and thus incomes were unstable. Watts responded by obtaining endorsements for his programs from several Commission clients and staff, including one from his friend and field worker, John Cunningham, the author of the 1940 pamphlet about the Commission. The investigation, that the Commission itself conducted, reported the charges unfounded. Watts reported that, following "the War" (World War II), getting ticking for the mattresses was difficult. Workers, then, questioned why broom makers were laid off and not the mattress workers. A follow-up investigation by a less involved body, recommended that there be a wider range of training, alternative employment to the Charlottesville shop be developed and it admonished Watts for his tight control and harsh language when dealing with his blind employees.

Records also contain a compliance review report from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) from the mid 50's. The report recommended that: Watts terminate the requirement for "all the white men" to begin their Commission services at the Charlottesville shop; that a wider range of employment opportunities be developed for blind clients; that there be more vocational training offered and that there be more home teachers hired to teach adult blind. According to interviews with some who remember conditions in Virginia during this period, blind Virginians had been suggesting improvements Watts should make at the Commission. The RSA report reinforced these views: "Men wanted to be able to bring their families to Charlottesville while 'in training' and/or marry while in training." According to individuals and a brief reference to the subject in Watts' papers, trainees were to remain single if not already married and those who were married were not permitted to bring their families to Charlottesville. The justification Watts gave was that there would be too

many blind people in Charlottesville causing problems and also that it might encourage blind people to marry one another which was "undesirable".

The brief reference in the Watts' papers to blind people marrying one another was one of blind Virginian's greatest frustrations. Blind couples receiving services from the Commission from its beginning until well into the 1940's had no children. These couples talked of how sterilization was common. Federationists interviewed recently, recall being told that males receiving Commission services were sterilized. The attitude that sterilizing blind people was appropriate in efforts to prevent hereditary blindness was part of the eugenics movement which peaked in the mid 1930's. Virginia did enact eugenics laws in 1924, and it was a Virginia case in which the U. S. Supreme Court held that sterilizing was an appropriate means to keep burdens to society at a minimum. The overall eugenics movement began to lose its popularity by the late 1930's-early 40's. Lessons learned from World War II changed policies and issues regarding eugenics. However, according to interviews conducted with blind Virginians, sterilization continued into the 1940's with regard to the blind.

These attitudes persisted into the 50's and 60's. While blind Virginians were no longer sterilized, Federationists interviewed recall being admonished to determine whether their blindness was hereditary. Men were told to "keep it in the barn", by counselors who believed blind people should not be parents and certainly should not take the chance of having a blind child.

Federationists also recall that to the blind, L. L. Watts was considered the worst commissioner and a blind dictator who thought most blind people could only handle sheltered shop employment. They report that Watts believed if you were blind and made too much money, you'd "throw it away" and thus to them, his justification for keeping shop wages so low a worker could barely get by.

During the 1950's and into the 1960's, blind Virginians still found employment opportunities limited to a few occupations. The Commission accepted that only that the blind could be vendors, shop workers, switchboard operators, medical transcriptionists, housekeepers, dishwashers, manufacturers and piano tuners. While there were a few teachers or lawyers in Virginia, the Commission did not train them. Even at VSDB, only the boys' gym teacher and the basketry teacher were blind.

As blind Virginians became more and more frustrated with their limited choices and the control over their lives by the Commission, they were ready to listen to the National Federation of the blind (NFB) organized by the blind to help themselves. The National Federation of the Blind was established in 1940 by Jacobus tenbroek, a California lawyer, who gathered blind people from seven states in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. This small band of blind people gathered to

begin work to improve the welfare system and to organize the blind as a collective voice speaking for themselves instead of depending on the charitable attitudes of the agencies serving the blind. The blind had learned through experience that their interests were not foremost in the agency-keeper policies and actions.

By the mid 1950's most states had state agencies whose purpose was to rehabilitate blind and other disabled people. Also, there were private agencies in business to "help the blind". These agencies however, as they gained strength and funding, were perceived by the blind as having the blind serve them. To the blind, these agencies were too ready to tell them how to live their lives and keep them dependent on the agencies rather than emphasize helping them to be independent. This was true in Virginia as well. Blind Virginians came to believe that they were to serve Watts instead of the Commission serving them. Although Watts had officially retired as Commission head in 1956, he, apparently, still, in 1958, held control of Commission programs with regard to how the blind were treated.

NFB representatives visited Virginia, and blind people listened and liked what they heard. They learned that it was, as they had hoped, possible for the blind to have a voice in their own lives. Virginians gathered, formed four local chapters and organized their first statewide meeting.

Richmond, Virginia, June 14, 1958, was the site of the first convention of the Virginia Federation of the Blind (VFB) at the Richmond Hotel. John Taylor, representing the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) office, presided at the meeting of 25 people representing four chapters: Norfolk, Richmond Area Federation, Shenandoah Federation-- Roanoke, and Potomac Federation covering Northern Virginia. John Taylor was sent by the National Federation of the Blind to help Virginia enter the Federation family. Four members of the North Carolina Federation of the Blind also participated in our first convention, sharing their experiences, particularly those related to the right to organize, and helping form our affiliate. Those elected as our first Board of Directors were: Robert McDonald of Alexandria, President; Stewart Bowden of Norfolk, First Vice President; William Wirtz of Richmond, Second Vice President; Marion McDonald of Alexandria, Recording Secretary; Lydia Stuples of Richmond, Corresponding Secretary; Bernard Cadd of Roanoke, Treasurer; David Krause of Alexandria one-year Board member; and Jimmy Nelson of Richmond, two-year board member. Our first constitution was adopted, and the convention voted to apply for membership in the National organization. News events of that same Spring included: Sputnik 2 (with dog Laika) burned up in the atmosphere; the first major league baseball game was played in California with the San Francisco Giants (the relocated New York Giants) defeating the Los Angeles Dodgers (the relocated Brooklyn Dodgers) 8-0; President Eisenhower ordered the National

Guard out of Little Rock, Arkansas, Central High School (he had sent them there to protect black students from violence by those opposing school integration); and Ernest Green (Central High's first negro student) & 600 whites graduated from that school; USSR launched Sputnik III; and the U. S. conducted eight nuclear tests.

Much of Virginia's foundation was laid at this first convention and the first two Board of Directors meetings held in July, 1958, and January, 1959, respectively. Policies were adopted reimbursing board members' meeting expenses with the approval of the President, bonding our treasurer, beginning meetings with prayer and requiring chapters that dissolve or become nonfunctional to turn all money over to the state affiliate treasury.

The Virginia Federation of the Blind's second convention took place April 17-19, 1959, in Alexandria at the George Mason Hotel, and Jacobus tenBroek represented the national office. Shortly before that convention, the VFB Board adopted the policy that all activities of the organization were open to all regardless of race or creed. According to VFB files, a "colored" man asked if he could come to the meeting, President McDonald checked with the hotel. The hotel officials had no objections, and the VFB went on record as accepting all who wished to come, a significant stand in a state which formally sanctioned racial segregation which would legally last another six years.

One of the first significant activities of the VFB was to work for the right to organize, a basic right assumed by those associated with labor unions and for whom, the traditional Labor Day holiday was observed. But in the late 50's this wasn't so for the blind. Senator John F. Kennedy, introduced legislation to protect the right of the blind to organize. The bill was introduced in an effort to protect the blind from the retaliation of the agencies serving the blind. Agencies which, like here in Virginia, stole jobs, refused services to VFB members, and harassed those joining the Federation. For example, early Federationists remember that when Watts heard that the blind were organizing, he reacted by seeing to it that Robert McDonald didn't remain in his vending stand at the Alexandria train station. VFB members recall meeting behind locked doors as Watts sent Commission employees to take names of those attending VFB local chapter meetings, and those people were threatened with loss of Commission services, including, they recall, their aid to the blind checks.

This behavior lasted through the Watts regime and began to lighten with future Commissioners. Watts, though, in addition to putting Robert McDonald out of his vending stand, wrote to Virginia's senators, in reaction to blind Virginians letters to their Congressional representatives, telling the Senators that the blind didn't need to organize, that individuals had the right to speak, and that the legislation proposed by Kennedy was inappropriate and duplicative. Copies

of Watts' letters were found in his papers at the VCU James Branch Cabell Library and also at the Jernigan Institute's tenBroek Library. While the blind were concentrating efforts on securing their right to organize, the Cold War (the battle for supremacy between the post war "superpowers" of the U.S. and the USSR) continued with the space race already underway with USSR sputniks vs. American satellites. In 1959, NASA named the first seven astronauts for Project Mercury, which was the project that would see America's first man orbiting the earth.

In the late 1950's, Virginia's blind not only struggled for the right to organize, but, like all blind Americans, faced discrimination in federal employment. This began to change by 1959, when the then Civil Service Commission (now the Office of Personnel Management) dropped the eye sight requirements for switchboard operators. Our affiliate records contain a resolution from the 1960 VFB convention commending the Civil Service Commission for dropping the sight requirement and the Virginia Commission for the visually Handicapped for providing the Braille devices needed for blind persons to operate PBX boards in federal agencies.

From its inception in Virginia, the Federation has worked with the Virginia General Assembly to see that Virginia's laws protect the rights of its blind citizens. Virginia code reflects our successful relationship with our lawmakers. The Virginia Federation of the Blind formed its Legislative Committee in the summer of 1958 with William Wirtz as its first Chairman. Blind Virginians of the 1950's, facing discrimination at every turn, found them opposed by the very agency which was supposed to help them, and in efforts to break away from the custodial environment, worked to have Virginia's lien laws abolished. These lien laws permitted a lien to be placed on any real property of a blind person who received aid to the blind payments. Such laws burdened families, holding them responsible for paying the costs of the blind pension back to the state after their blind family member died. Such laws effectively kept blind persons from owning property. Our convention resolutions from 1959 until 1970 reflect the work done to have these laws abolished. Finally, we were successful. These lien laws were scratched from the Virginia code in the 1970's.

While our VFB learned to influence legislation, the blind began speaking for themselves, and as the right to organize events touched Virginia, our new VFB was also affected by the brewing internal struggles of our national organization. As organizations grow and strengthen, it is human nature for divisions to occur in approach and ideas of how the organization should proceed. Such was the case with the NFB and thus our own affiliate. Leadership was questioned, ugly behavior ensued and members departed. David Krause, affiliate charter board member and treasurer of the Potomac Chapter, resigned from the organization in August, 1960, after being dismissed by the Potomac

Federation. William Cadd, affiliate treasurer and one of the shop workers involved in the 1945 group of blind workers questioning the practices of the Watts administration, also left the VFB. Robert McDonald, Virginia delegate to the 1961 national NFB convention, voted in favor of that convention's resolutions supporting the national elected leadership. At the July, 1961, VFB board meeting there was an attempt to revoke this support; however it was unsuccessful. VFB adopted resolutions mirroring those passed by the National organization refusing agenda time to the George Card/Durward McDaniel minority-led faction traveling the nation attempting to undermine the NFB tenBroek administration. The refusal resolutions were the first item on the agenda at the 1961 VFB convention held at the Richmond Hotel in Richmond. Card-McDaniel personnel were in the hotel. The earnest leadership of the VFB, however, remained with the leadership of Jacobus tenBroek and our national organization.

After a brief period of slowed activity following the upheaval within the NFB, the VFB continued growing, taking more control over our lives as blind Virginians. While our Norfolk Chapter dissolved in early 1959 and our Roanoke Chapter dissolved in 1963, 1960's found the affiliate again growing membership. The Skyline Federation in Harrisonburg came into the VFB in May, 1960. The Winchester Federation was brought into the Federation family in July, 1961, by VFB Board resolution.

Another aspect of determining our own lives was dealing with the issue of blind persons securing loans. With employment opportunities and incomes small, blind people could not secure bank loans. In August of 1960, the VFB board discussed the concept of a federal credit union system whereby the organization could loan money to its members since the banks would not. The Federation was strong enough to form a credit union in 1973, and the Federation of the Blind Credit union operated until well into the 1980's. It was closed only after several years had passed in which no loans were requested. It was also during the period from the 1960's into the 1980's that Federationists found themselves working for the right to secure a safe deposit box at a bank. Bank officials believed that a blind person had to have a sighted co-signer. Through persistence, blind Virginians now go to banks, secure safe deposit boxes, and examine their contents in private.

During the 1960's records show that the VFB raised most of its money through local chapter fundraisers such as selling fruitcakes, candy, etc. VFB treasury reports indicate the VFB retained between \$820 and \$2000 through the 1960's. Most expenditures were for travel, postage, and white cane safety day publicity. Federation records reference the idea of obtaining foundation grants. From the mid 1960's this concept has been explored and recently some funds have been obtained through grants. In 1972 the VFB established an endowment fund, the VFB Memorial Fund. Marion McDonald handled it from its

inception until the late 1980's. This fund's name was changed to the Marion McDonald Endowment Fund in 1988. The Richmond Area Federation donated the memory book containing names of those in whose names donations are made, which has been kept since 1972. In 1973 a statewide fundraiser was initiated, designated the White Cane mailing. This mailing continues today.

By the mid 1960's relations with the Virginia Commission for the Visually Handicapped (formally called the Virginia Commission for the Blind) improved. Bill Coppage, appointed as Acting Director in 1964, agreed to meet with the VFB, and we initiated the Liaison Committee. This Committee, chaired by Jimmy Nelson of Richmond, talked with Bill Coppage to strengthen the Commission's home teacher program, obtain more vending stands in public buildings, and increase mobility training by hiring additional mobility instructors. Coppage participated in VFB conventions during the 1960's. In 1966 VFB passed resolutions commending the Commission for its relationship with the VFB. It also took a position that Virginia should have a rehabilitation center (Virginians then were being sent to Arkansas for rehabilitation training). Kenneth Jernigan was specifically invited to the VFB 1967 Convention to share the success stories and philosophy of the Iowa Commission for the Blind where he served as Director. A resolution of the 1967 Convention urges Commission officials to visit the Iowa Commission and structure Virginia's program according to Iowa's model. Kenneth Jernigan had directed The Iowa Commission for nine years, and that Agency had gone from having the worst rehabilitation program in the nation to having the best. The NFB philosophy that blind people can and will lead normal lives with appropriate training and opportunities was proven to be true. The VFB wanted Virginia's blind to have those same opportunities.

The VFB also generated its own programs to encourage and support Virginia's blind. Federationists, at the 1962 convention, held at the Belle Meade Motel, Harrisonburg, VA, established a mobility awards program where by VSDB students received awards in three categories related to cane travel skill. The VFB continued presenting these awards into the 1970's. Creating the award reflects the importance of mobility and symbolizes that the white cane is a mark of independence rather than a tool to trigger pity and fear. It was also in the early 1960's that we began speaking to the Virginia General Assembly of the need to have a White Cane Law passed in Virginia. Our white cane became the symbol of our growing independence. Our national office developed a model White Cane Law, and affiliates took it to their state law makers. The proposed White Cane Law focused on erasing the idea of contributory negligence. It was assumed, before our White Cane Laws were passed, that a blind person was automatically at fault if he was involved in an accident, simply due to the fact that he couldn't see. The White Cane Laws, which we made sure were enacted, appropriately hold the negligent party responsible. Our VFB newsletters are peppered with White Cane events such as proclamations from the Mayor of

Alexandria, county boards and throughout the state. Our members stood outside stores and passed out White Cane literature, telling the public that we may be blind, but we are also capable of taking our place as responsible citizens. Our Virginia newsletter contains an item in the Spring of 1970 stating that a White Cane Bill was introduced in the General Assembly too late for consideration in the 1970 session, but was referred to Committee for further study. The Commonwealth did adopt White Cane legislation in the early 1970's.

We spent much of our 1960's energy securing equality walking our streets. We, along with others, were working to have our voices heard in the late 1960's: black students seized the finance building at Northwestern University, and 400 students seized the administration building at Cheyney State College. The Vietnam War was dividing the nation. Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy were assassinated. Mohamed Ali was indicted for refusing to be inducted into the Army. The U.S. bombed Hanoi. The Lunar Orbiter 4 began orbiting the moon while our VFB, celebrating our tenth anniversary, rededicated ourselves to spreading equality, opportunity, and security for all blind persons.

Presidents during our first decade were: Robert McDonald who held that office from 1958 to 1962. Milton Perry served as VFB President from 1962 to 1964. Robert McDonald was elected President again in 1964 and continued until Dorothea Foulkrod of Richmond became VFB President in 1968. Marion McDonald remained Recording Secretary throughout the first ten years. Lydia Stuples and Jimmy Nelson continued in responsible positions. Ten years found the VFB with six affiliates across Virginia. Two new chapters, the Hampton Roads Federation and the Tidewater Federation, covering Portsmouth and Norfolk, received charters at the 1968 VFB convention. In 1969 VFB welcomed the Blueridge Chapter in Charlottesville, and in 1970 the Tidewater Federation folded, and Robert McDonald resumed the Presidency.

VFB's second decade saw further internal strengthening. In 1971 VFB established a Jacobus tenBroek award to be given to an individual or group doing the most to "better" the lives of the blind. The first tenBroek awards went to the Thomas Jefferson Lions Club of Charlottesville, the Rockingham County 4-H Group for their work with local chapters, and State Senator Leroy Bendheim of Alexandria received a Jacobus tenBroek Award for shepherding White Cane Law legislation.

In 1973 the NFBV established the Marian J. Kelly Award to be given, only when appropriate, to an individual NFBV member. Robert and Marion McDonald presented the first Marion Kelley award to Nancy Hoover of the Skyline Federation for her outstanding work in getting the Federation Credit Union going. Marian J. Kelly was a sighted member who, until her untimely and tragic death,

dedicated her volunteer time driving Federationists all over the Commonwealth and serving as reader to help further the goals of the NFB.

Recognizing the need to reach out to college students, we established a scholarship program. During the 1970's and into the 1980's one scholarship a year was awarded. In the late 1980's this program expanded to three scholarships, and we named it the James F. Nelson Scholarship Program in memory of one of the affiliate founders and constant leaders, Jimmy Nelson.

In the mid 1990's NFBV added another program to its internal structure. The McDonald Fellows Program was created to focus on membership building. The fellowship was named after Robert McDonald, founder, first affiliate President, mentor, and membership builder. These fellowships are awarded annually to new NFBV members who demonstrate interest in the affiliate through their activity and commitment to the organization. Fellowships are financial awards to defray costs of the recipient's first national NFB Convention. Martha McGinnis of Lynchburg was the first McDonald Fellow. More recent recipients were: Tracy Soforenko, Mary Chappell, Mary Durban, Debbie Jackson, Robin Hurber, and several family awards.

President Fred Schroeder initiated the "President's Award" in 2005. The plaque recognizes an NFBV member who the President chooses for his/her dedication to the NFBV, its principles and programs. Althea Pittman, Larry Povinelli and Maurice Peret were its first three recipients.

In addition to internal programs and gaining new chapters, the 1970's saw us turn our attention to wider employment opportunities. Our struggles with the agencies serving the blind intensified as we became adamant about the need to improve rehabilitation services for the blind. It was in 1972 that the Virginia Federation of the Blind officially changed its name to reflect the unity and growing strength of the national organization. NFBV welcomed the Piedmont Chapter at its 1972 convention, and the Tri-city and Augusta Chapters were chartered in 1973. A new Tidewater Chapter was organized in 1976. NFBV had ten chapters adding strength to Virginia as our NFB became solid in its organization and spoke with a louder, more competent voice, under the national leadership of Kenneth Jernigan. Dr. Jernigan succeeded Jacobus TenBroek as President after Dr. Jacobus tenBroek's death in March, 1968.

The agencies, whose job it was to serve the blind, in an effort to thwart the strengthening blind consumer movement, banded together and formed what they called an accrediting agency, the National Accreditation Council (NAC). In 1965, the NFB sat in with the agencies as they developed what they would call accreditation standards. We disagreed with the standards they developed, and they ignored our recommendations. While we believed in accreditation, we

wanted the agencies to actually have legitimate accreditation standards which NAC did not. The agencies continued their plan, ignoring our voices.

The Virginia Commission, under Bill Coppage, had been friendly toward Virginia's blind since the mid 1960's. However, that relationship deteriorated when Coppage, signed up with the National Accreditation Council (NAC), served on the accreditation board, and became a real insider of the NAC group.

Much of our rich folk history comes from this era, as we created songs to convey our message to the NAC boards as they met inside, and we met outside their fancy hotel meeting places. Affiliate members, mainly Robert and Marion McDonald, were always part of these activities. One year, we used Christmas Carol tunes to convey our message because the police in the city where NAC met were asked by the NACsters to keep us quiet. The police told us we couldn't chant. We put our chants into carol format, and we sang while the police smiled. The Virginia agency didn't drop its NAC accreditation until the early 1990's when then, acting Commissioner Nell Carney, just didn't pay the dues. By then NAC had grown weak and had barely a dozen members to keep it afloat.

We had accomplished quite a bit in our first 20 years, particularly in the legislative arena and in breaking away from the agencies hold. Federationists had become members of advisory committees of the Commission. We continued the VFB-initiated liaison Committee with the Commission established in 1964 when Bill Coppage was appointed as Acting Director, the third person to hold that position. We had gained enough strength that the Agency, while still not fond of the organized blind, could no longer ignore us. Jimmy Nelson of Richmond served on the Advisory Committee and continued chairing the Liaison Committee.

Since the mid 1960's the Liaison Committee was the NFBV's most effective communication with the Virginia Commission for the Visually Handicapped. The Federation advocated for the rehabilitation center. That center was established, but did not follow the model of the Iowa Commission as Federationists recommended; however, Federationists, refusing to be discouraged, kept meeting with Bill Coppage regarding activities at his agency. Federation records show that Federationists remained vigilant regarding conditions at the workshops, continued to urge improvements in mobility training, and pressed for expansion of the Randolph-Sheppard Program. Upon several occasions we testified before the General Assembly urging lawmakers to maintain the separate agency for the blind.

While Coppage met with the blind, the Commission Board would not. Federationists were sent out at every meeting as the Board would declare an executive session in order to avoid doing their business in public.

Federationists gained majority status on the agency's Advisory Committee in the mid 1970's. At one point that committee, without permission from the agency, held a press conference with the NFBV to get the public's attention about conditions in the Virginia Industries for the Blind workshops. Conditions in those shops had not changed much since the 1950's and the Agency Board, instead of talking to the Federation, hid in executive sessions. The press conference achieved its goal, and the agency met with the NFBV. NFBV began talking to legislators of the need for the organized blind to be represented on the Commission's Board. By its 20th anniversary, the NFBV was both disliked and feared. The blind were making a difference.

Robert McDonald stepped down and Walt Webber of Richmond was elected President in 1974. When Walt Webber resigned in 1975, First Vice President Alan Schlank took his place. Alan guided the affiliate until 1978 when Charles Brown (Charlie) was elected.

The airlines, too, took up some of our time during the 1970's. We battled their custodial ideas as they attempted to take our canes, tried to force us to sit on blankets in our seats (fearing we'd soil the plane upholstery), move us to bulkhead seating and initiated sundry other insulting events. Again we took part in writing songs to express our coming freedoms and our disgust with our demeaning treatment. Many of our affiliate members played a major role in shutting down US Airways one Wednesday evening in January, 1985. That airline denied boarding its aircraft because one of our members refused to leave his previously assigned exit row seat. In 1985 there were no regulations prohibiting a blind person from sitting in exit row seats. We accompanied our Indiana Federationists to National Airport and managed to shut down the ticket counter and delay the flight by blocking the gates as airport personnel kept moving the aircraft from gate to gate, thinking they could fool the blind.

In the fall of 1988 Midwest Airlines had Potomac Chapter member Bill Meeker arrested and removed from his flight to Milwaukee for refusing to leave his assigned exit row seat. Charges were dropped against Bill before the Arlington County judge could hear the case, but not before Bill, in his quiet persuasive way, introduced the arresting officer to his Federation family which proceeded to educate the officer as to how he had been used by the airlines to carry out their discriminatory policies. The Arlington police officer had come to the courthouse to fulfill his police officer duties. We, like many Americans during the 1960's, 70's and 80's, took to picket lines and street demonstrations to make our point. Virginia Federationists picketed the Greyhound station in Richmond when schedule cuts were threatened. The Richmond newspapers reported that activity.

NAC false accreditation claims, nonresponsive rehabilitation programs, and the inappropriate behavior of the airlines took our members' time during the 70's and into the 80's. Meanwhile, the conditions in the workshops continued drawing our attention. Virginia runs two workshops, one in Richmond and one in Charlottesville (vestiges of the state's days of black/white segregation.) It was a long hard struggle, but the NFBV, along with our brothers and sisters across the nation, finally gained minimum wage for blind shop workers. It didn't happen until the 1980's here in Virginia. We presented our case and justification for minimum wage for our Virginia Industries for the Blind workers to the Virginia Commission Board, but they didn't want to hear it. Again they shut us out of their meetings by entering into executive session. Minimum wage finally happened through our work with other state officials. Through our efforts, Virginia Industries for the Blind workers achieved minimum wage and also gained insurance benefits.

However with minimum wage and insurance matters settled, there was still work to be done. Two shop workers, Kathy and Stewart Owen, long time excellent shop workers and strong Federationists, were inappropriately suspended. As they attempted to appeal their case, nothing happened. The workers invited NFBV board members to assist, and Federationists joined the appeal. As the day approached for the hearing, Federationists, although part of the hearing panel, could not get directions to the hearing location. We found it anyhow, and arrived on time for the hearing. The two employees were reinstated.

Our work with our Virginia General Assembly began in the 1950's as we worked to abolish the lien laws. The 1970's brought us the White Cane Law. We presented our justifications to our legislators to assure blind persons could serve on juries, purchase insurance without a blindness based penalty, provide blind students' access to Braille in school, and achieve nonvisual access to state-funded electronic information. We were instrumental in the change in the Virginia code permitting more than one type of voting machine at polling places. Most recently, we were successful in having NFB-Newsline ® funds added to the Department for the Blind and vision Impaired's budget. (NFB-Newsline ® is a free dial-in electronic newspaper service developed by our National organization.) Our General Assembly members know we will be there to educate them about our legislative agendas, and they know too that we do our homework and present facts with which they can justify patroning our requested legislation.

As we finished the 1980's and entered the 1990's, the agencies that were left in NAC placed it on life support, but not before its Virginia appendage died. Agencies across the nation, including our own, were improving services and relationships with the blind. Virginia Industries for the Blind employees were

now earning higher than the minimum wages we had previously secured. Through our work with the General Assembly, we obtained benefits for VIB workers, served on juries, bought insurance without discrimination based on our blindness, and by the 2000 election, we were voting independently. Charles Brown served as President from 1978 until 2004. During his tenure, we strengthened our relationship with the General Assembly, strengthened our relationship with Commission personnel, and continued our reputation as one of the Federation's strongest affiliates.

Much of the NFBV new strength arose through the 1980's and 1990's by turning attention to targeted education. Parents, Diabetics, Student and Merchants' Divisions were organized. We were reaching out to parents to help them navigate the laws and regulations, which were intended to assure that their blind children receive an appropriate education, but like many things, the reality of the laws intent needed advocates. Federationists learned the laws and helped parents understand how to obtain Braille, cane travel instruction, and the other tools needed to become successful blind adults. In 1995 our NFBV Parents Division President, Vicky Messig, was the one who found that Virginia's financial formula regarding disabled student case loads are different for blind public school students. NFBV continues to work on resolving the case load issue. Braille, once taught to every blind child, was falling out of favor by the professionals. NFBV, like many affiliates and our national organization, formed another Division to concentrate on Braille literacy, the Virginia Association to Promote the Use of Braille (VAPUB). VAPUB now sponsors Braille literacy campaigns, Braille reading contests, and holds Braille carnivals at conventions as part of a growing youth activities program.

The NFBV Merchants Division works to hold the Agency serving the blind accountable to its blind Randolph-Sheppard vendors. During the mid 1990's Merchants' Division President Joe Shankle found a \$10,000 discrepancy in the nominee agency budget and saw to it that the funds were paid back to the blind vendors. That Division spent its time helping its members learn how to do its own paperwork to operate their businesses. The Agency, as a remaining vestige of custodial care, still handles administrative work that merchants, if appropriately trained, could do for themselves. Education is sometimes difficult as self-belief often takes a long time to learn.

Diabetics Division members focus on educating the medical community of how blind diabetics can manage their own insulin and remain independent through the use of tools such as the talking glucometer and insulin containers designed for tactile use. The NFB publication "The Voice of the Diabetic" began in the mid 1980's, is read by health professionals, diabetics and their families throughout the Commonwealth due to Virginia Federationists work.

From the mid 1980's and into the 21st century, ten chapters joined the NFBV. The Seven Hills Chapter representing the Lynchburg area was chartered in 1987. We welcomed the Peninsula Chapter in 1995. The Fairfax Chapter entered the affiliate in 1998; Eastern Shore Chapter, 2001; Fredericksburg Area Chapter, 2001; Chesapeake Bay Chapter, 2003; Greater Williamsburg Chapter, 2004; Prince William County Chapter, 2004; VSDB Junior Chapter, 2006; and Greater Springfield Chapter, 2007.

As we carry on into the 21st century, we continue working with the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, (formerly the Commission for the Visually Handicapped), the Virginia Department of Education, and the General Assembly to change that formula by which teachers of our public school blind students' caseloads and salaries are determined. The current Standards of Quality (SOQ) formula excludes blind children and the teachers hired to teach them nonvisual learning skills. They were excluded when the SOQ formula was developed because the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired had been assigned responsibility for handling resource teacher salaries for teachers dealing with the blind in the 1950's. DBVI did not keep up to salaries offered to other special education teachers dealing with other disabilities.

During the 1940's and 1950's sight conservation classes were wide-spread in Virginia and throughout the nation. It was believed that those who had some vision should "conserve" it. Consequently, public school classes, which were unavailable to students who could not read print, were available to those who professionals believed could benefit from these sight saving programs. Teachers were hired who specialized in teaching students who, they determined, had too much sight to go to the schools for the blind, but could not see well enough to participate in the traditional classroom. The General Assembly appropriated funds enabling the Commission to pay half of the salary of these sight conservation teachers. While, given beliefs about using vision may have been appropriate at that time, over the past 60 years, much has changed. This situation no longer is appropriate for current public school enrollments since federal laws now require that all students, regardless of visual acuity, be educated in public schools. This vestige of past practices is now detrimental to blind students as the result of the older appropriations law leaving Virginia's teachers of blind students with too high a caseload and thus blind students are effectively denied appropriate educational services.

As we continue our relationships with the Virginia government, the General Assembly and other policymaking bodies, we also are reaching out to new populations facing issues which didn't exist 50 or even 30 years ago. The NFBV, in partnership with our newly established Jernigan Institute in Baltimore, headquarters of the NFB, spends time in youth training programs. Blind youth, who once learned nonvisual skills at residential schools for the blind,

do not have such opportunities in their home communities where they attend public schools. Thus, the NFB developed several youth training programs to fill this gap. NFBV now sponsors youth training weekends in which students learn nonvisual techniques, gain confidence as blind people, and find, through networking with other blind people, that they are not alone.

As people live longer and new technologies are discovered, many older citizens lose vision and need to adopt new skills. The NFBV encourages its seniors through support groups and seminars to help them internalize the idea that independence and a full life can continue after vision loss. The aim is to keep seniors at home instead of warehoused in institutions.

Virginia became nationally recognized as a strong affiliate of the NFB. NFBV President Charlie Brown was elected to the National Board of Directors in 1984 and remained there until 2000 when he became NFB Treasurer. Charlie also received the NFB's Jacobus Tenbroek Award in 2006. That award is only given in years when someone "deserves" that recognition. Charlie stepped down as affiliate president in 2004, after 26 years, and Virginia Federationists elected Fred Schroeder. Fred Schroeder, former Commissioner of the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration, and current First Vice President of the NFB was no stranger to Virginians. He continues Virginia's strong Federation involvement. Under Fred's leadership the affiliate has grown.

Since Virginia officially joined the National Federation of the Blind with Robert McDonald accepting Virginia's charter at the 1958 NFB convention, our relationship with the state agency for the blind has moved 180 degrees. L. L. Watts, its first Commissioner, is remembered by blind Virginians as a cruel dictator. Those who headed the Agency during the 60's and 70's and '80's, had little respect for the organized blind movement, but knew it was here to stay.

As we grew stronger over the years and the NAC issues died, we found the Agency more willing to listen to its constituency. By the 1990's Agency personnel knew they were no longer the spokesman for the blind of the Commonwealth. As the long-time members of the Commission Board disappeared into history, newly appointed Board members accepted Federation members with open minds. By the time Federationist Seville Allen was appointed to the seven member Board in 1988, Agency officials and its Board resigned themselves to the fact that they could no longer hide. They had to meet the NFBV at the conference tables...and they did.

For many years now, we have enjoyed a working relationship with the Agency's policymakers, but fear of the Federation did not disappear from Commission unwritten policies until the 1990's. Today we still find individual Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired employees who attempt to frame

us as harmful intruders, even though now in 2008, we have formed a partnership with the Agency serving the blind and enjoy working together to continue our march to equality. Federationists, once barred from employment by the Agency, are now directing its most strategic program, the Residential Training Program, serving as rehabilitation counselors and tutors. The NFBV was behind the appointment of current Commissioner Ray Hopkins and several members of the Agency's seven-member Board and its advisory committees.

While we have not yet reached our goal of first class citizenship in all areas, we have made tremendous gains over the past 50 years. We continue working to achieve that goal dreamed of so long ago when Jacobus tenBroek first gathered representatives from seven states to form the National Federation of the Blind, and 18 years later invited Virginia into the Federation family. Our first Federation teachers here in Virginia would be proud of the organization they began, taught us to be a part of, and to love. Now it is up to this generation of leaders to pass their passion, knowledge, and love to the next generation. It is time to honor our past and embrace our next 50 years. .

LOCAL CHAPTERS: BACKBONE OF THE AFFILIATE

Our local Chapters have contributed to this history, and here is what they say:

Richmond Area Federation -- A Virginia Beginning

In 1958 few Virginians had heard of the National Federation of the Blind. However, those who heard of the organization and its positive message about blindness took hope for Virginia and formed The Richmond Area Federation of the Blind. Lydia Stuples, Dorothea Folkrod, Jimmy Nelson and William Wirtz were some of this Chapter's founding members. These blind people met in November of 1957. While most blind people asked to join feared reprisal from Watts' Commission for the Blind, the Chapter adopted a constitution and began traveling the Commonwealth to expand the Federation.

The Richmond industrial workshop, established by the Commission in the late 1940's, was a primary recruitment source, but few joined. As early Federationists recall, Commission employees came to meetings and took names so that later they could threaten to take away their jobs. The blind, with few other opportunities, stayed away from the Federation. This fear prevailed in central Virginia until well into the 1970's.

Many of our first affiliate leaders came from this chapter. Jimmy Nelson served as an officer from the beginning of the organization until his death in the late 1980's. Dorothea Folkrod served as the affiliates third President. Other Richmond Area Federation leaders were: Ed Peay, who also worked as Merchants Division President; Joe Shankle, who was known for his hospitality and his superb downtown cafeteria; Marshall Jordan, one of the first Federationists hired by the Agency serving the blind, and many others who have strived to keep the Federation strong in Virginia.

This Chapter, once very small due to the fear tactics of the Commission, now is led by employees of that Agency. The Director of the Agency's Residential Rehabilitation Center, tutors, and counselors are active members. Its current President, Maurice Peret, is the first blind mobility instructor employed by that Agency.

Potomac Federation of the Blind -- Spreading the Hope
By Seville Allen

May, 1957: The Pulitzer Prize was awarded to John F Kennedy for his book Profiles in Courage. Senator Joe McCarthy (the communist hunter) died. The last live "I love Lucy" show aired on CBS TV. A prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, DC, was the biggest civil rights demonstration to date. Northern Virginia schools were still segregated and it would be two years before four Arlington black children entered a junior high school. The National Baseball League approved the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers move to the west coast. Also, the Potomac Federation of the Blind held its first organizing meeting. John Taylor of our national office came to Virginia to work with Robert and Marion McDonald to bring Virginia into a growing organization of blind people.

The Virginia Commission for the Blind administered the Commonwealth's aid for the blind (later folded into the social security program). The blind of Virginia went to the school for the Blind and upon graduation, if one needed services from the Commission (and a blind person did if he didn't come from a monied family), Col. Watts ran your life. This was the setting in which John Taylor found the McDonalds when he asked them to join the Federation. Together they recruited 18 people during that first year, and on May 14, 1958, the PFB adopted its first constitution with 40 members voting for its adoption. The Chapter met at the YMCA in downtown Alexandria until the late 60's, when it moved to the Chickapen Recreation Center where it met until the early 1980's. Its first president was Robert McDonald, and Marion also held office.

From its inception, this Chapter played a significant role in the leadership of our Virginia affiliate. The McDonalds were charter members of the state affiliate, officially chartered in 1958 with four chapters. Robert McDonald was the affiliate's first president and Marion McDonald the affiliate's first recording secretary.

The PFB met behind closed doors and had a sergeant at arms check people as they entered. Window shades were drawn during meetings as members had been informed by those who believed in our movement that Commission "spies" checked to see who participated in NFB activity. This

behavior lasted through the Watts regime and began to lighten only with future Commissioners.

During the 1960's as Federationists worked for passage of White Cane legislation, Chapter members stood outside stores such as the old Kann's Department store (now the site of the George Mason Law School) and passed out White Cane literature. It was during the White Cane educational programs that we celebrated our tenth anniversary. Our first presidents were Robert (Mac) McDonald, who was with us until his death in 2004; Milton Perry, who moved out of the area in the 1970's; Gene Miller, served in the mid 1960's; Jim Copeland, a successful self-employed chair caner, was with us until the late 1970's; A. J. (Bill) Pettit served the last two years of the 60's; Marion McDonald served as President into the 1970's, and remained active until her death in 1994; and Jack Weekly was PFB president following Marion in the early 1970's. Alan Schlank was elected following Jack Weekly. Alan first came to Virginia in 1965, moved to Maryland for a short time and then returned to our Chapter in 1971. He served as president in the early 1970's until he became affiliate president in 1975. Alan was followed by Vince Allen, a blind real estate broker.

The 1970's saw the Potomac Chapter continue its affiliate leadership, and it is difficult to separate chapter activities from those on the affiliate level. Potomac Chapter members took part in NAC and airline demonstrations, continued participating in county fairs, marches in local parades, and continued educating the public and participating in youth activities.

Chapter fund raisers have varied over the years. During the 70's and into the late 1980's, Potomac Chapter members participated in an Oyster Roast sponsored by Lions Clubs. Each fall, Chapter members gathered yard sale type items and sold them at these Oyster feasts. And, for many years neighborhoods looked forward to what became the "Potomac Chapter Yard Sales". We made these twice-a-year events a social activity by starting early in the morning selling our no longer wanted items, sharing lunch, and after cleaning up the yard (either the Brown's or Seville Allen's), going out to dinner.

During the 1990's and now in the 21st century, we continue reaching out to youth, senior citizens, and families of newly blinded persons. The Chapter now meets near a "Metro" station on the Orange Line giving non-drivers easy access to our meeting location. Since the 1980's, we have met in three different churches—Central Methodist Church located on Fairfax Drive in Arlington, Trinity Episcopal Church, located on Columbia Pike in Arlington, and currently at St. George's Episcopal Church, located on North Oakland Street one block from the Virginia Square Metro station.

Those Presidents following Vince Allen who have kept the dream alive and continued to lead us on our journey are: Charlie Brown, Seville Allen, Jerry Yeager, Patty Droppers, Larry Povinelli and current President, Tracy Soforenko.

Winchester Federation -- Long Term and Steady

The Winchester Federation was the fifth chapter of our Virginia affiliate. Chartered in 1961, this chapter has always been interested in education. Each year the affiliate can count on a donation to support the affiliate's James F. Nelson Scholarship Program.

At one point, this Chapter had a "kitchen band" made up of members who played for various community events in the Winchester area. It was quite popular.

Blue Ridge Chapter

Our Charlottesville Chapter (Blue Ridge Federation of the Blind) was formed in 1969 at a meeting held at the home of Bill and Dorothy Sullivan. Kathy Owen was one of its first members. VSDB alumni and sheltered shop employees were primary recruitment sources; however, some members were recruited from the blind bowling league, organized in 1963.

Most of the Charlottesville workshop employees chose not to join, stating that there was nothing the NFB could do for them. They believed they got their jobs on their own and there were vendors who believed the NFB "messed up their rights" when members of the Vendors Council questioned quarterly statements and the uses of the high set-aside payments. What early Chapter members recall most was that fear dominated the blind worker's lives. Chapter members recall that someone from the Virginia Commission attended Chapter meetings and made a list of those in attendance. This caused some to fear that they would lose their jobs and/or future rehab services if the Agency knew they had joined the Federation.

Henderson Beavers, a long time Federationist and former Charlottesville industrial shop worker, recalls the Charlottesville workshop conditions with its pervasive itch of broom corn. He remembers feeling that most of his coworkers were so grateful to have a job because they believed that there wasn't much else

they could do. He believes that most couldn't imagine ever having another job except at the shop.

For some time, the Blue Ridge Chapter had a working relationship with the VSDB due to the Alumni Association and the fact that many chapter members were VSDB graduates. For several years, Chapter members presented cash prizes to students who had achieved academic excellence.

Most chapter fundraisers have included sales of candy, raffle tickets, cookies and key chains. More unusual items sold were feather dusters, combs, knives, Halloween candy. Also, Blue Ridge raised funds by selling VCR tapes and Woody Berry band performances brought some funds to the treasury. The first walk-a-thon was in 1991, and this fundraiser has occurred annually ever since.

Tidewater Chapter -- A New Beginning

Our current Tidewater Chapter joined the NFBV in 1976. Dawnelle Cruze, fresh from graduate school, asked for help to organize a new chapter in the Tidewater area. It was done. While our first chapters formed in this area couldn't continue, our current Tidewater Chapter will soon celebrate 23 years. Its current President is Stewart Prost. This chapter primarily serves the Portsmouth and Norfolk areas.

Peninsula Chapter-- Expanding Federationism **By Althea P. Pittman**

A native of Hampton, VA, Althea Pittman, returned home in 1990. Althea had been living in Maryland and brought her new Federation knowledge to Virginia. One of the first things on her agenda was to find employment and the next was to create a local chapter in her home town. She had discussions with long time friends and seminarians Stuart Prost, and then President Charlie Brown, concerning forming a Peninsula Chapter.

She began to investigate areas in which she felt she could meet other blind individuals. The Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Hampton was her first target. Through her job at the Peninsula Center for Independent Living, she learned information of how a former Peninsula Chapter had been started. She publicized the meetings; she gathered names of interested individuals; and secured a date and location for their first meeting at the Peninsula Center for Independent Living in 1995. Our state president Charlie Brown was present, our officers were selected: Althea P. Pittman as President; Uricka Harrison, Vice President; Denise Wilkins, Secretary; Florence Tynes Treasurer; and Steve

Banks, Chapter Representative to the NFBV Board. Others present were: Mike Levey, Charlie Hill, Reagan Hudson, Gladys Floyd, Marietta Karns, Corliss Jones and Audrey Johnson. Over the years many of these individuals have served as VP, Secretary, or Treasurer. In 1997, the Peninsula Chapter began to hold its meetings at the Hampton Regional Library on Victoria Blvd. Then the Peninsula Chapter moved to a more centralized location to meet between Hampton and Newport News, the Northampton Branch Library on Big Bethel Rd.

The Peninsula Chapter hosted the 2005 State Convention. The banquet tallied over 200 people, exceeding any past registration attendance in Virginia Affiliate history. At this convention, Dr. Fred Schroeder presented Peninsula Chapter President, Althea Pittman, with the President's Award. Althea served as President until the commuting from the Eastern Shore to Hampton became a stretch, and she needed to devote herself to the newly formed Eastern Shore Chapter of the NFBV. Corliss Jones, a commuter from Williamsburg and a leader in her own right serving as Secretary for a number of years, was encouraged by Althea to organize a Greater Williamsburg Chapter. They left the Peninsula Chapter in the capable hands of Andre Tynes, who became President in 2006. He is a graduate of Norfolk State University, is now enrolled graduate school, and is a recent recipient of a 2008 NFB National Student Scholarship. Present officers are Uricka Harrison, Vice President; Robert Hennigan, Secretary; Ben Farmer, Treasurer; Cynthia Beverly, Chaplin; and Hardy Alexander, Sergeant at Arms. Other members are James Buckman, Charles Stanley, Linda Kindred, Runella Barnes, Carshina Gary, and Arnetta Thompson.

In June of 2008, the Peninsula Chapter helped support a deaf-blind student named Charvelle Bitting, who graduated from elementary school. President Andre Tynes spoke at his graduation ceremony which was held at Saunders Elementary. This event was featured on Channel 10 News and in the Dailey Press Newspaper. Also in June, as part of a Fundraiser, Pianist Charles D. Stanley performed at Mary Helens, a local Hampton restaurant, and he as well as President Tynes spoke on the FM 103 radio station to promote the event.

The Peninsula Chapter can boast of the various community activities that it has participated in throughout the past, such as Disability Awareness Day and more. We look forward to working within our community and with other Chapters striving for equality for the Blind.

Fairfax Chapter -- Moving the Federation Westward in Northern Virginia By John Bailey

The Fairfax Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind was founded in November of 1998. The very first meeting was held at the Fairfax County Library (Fairfax City Branch) on the third-Thursday of that month.

At the first meeting, we elected chapter officers and adopted a chapter constitution. Some of the leaders elected at that meeting were: Katherine Bond, President; Cathy Schroeder, Secretary; and I was elected Vice-President. Both Katherine and Cathy headed the effort to establish the new chapter in the Fairfax City area.

The reason for the new chapter was because the only other nearest NFBV chapter (Potomac Chapter) was just too far of a commute for those who lived in the Vienna and Fairfax areas. The first meeting of the Fairfax Chapter had over 30 attendees. Several members of the Potomac Chapter also attended in an effort to help get the new chapter off to a good start.

Many of those who attended the first meeting are still active in the Federation today. They were Charlie Brown, Jacki Brown, Seville Allen, Larry Povinelli, and Cathy Schroeder. Because of a family obligation, Katherine Bond had to step down after serving 6 months as President. John Bailey took over that office and has been President ever since.

One of the earliest activities the chapter participated in was its first fund raiser. We auctioned off convention coffee cups collected by Robert (Mac) McDonald during his many years in the organization. This is a good point in the Fairfax Chapter story to introduce Mac to those who may not have heard of him or who did not have the great opportunity to meet him in person. He brought several dozen of his prized national convention coffee cups. Each cup was distinctive because it had the date and location of that particular convention along with a distinctive logo on it. Jacki Brown was the auctioneer for Mac's convention coffee cups and we raised over \$300. I bought several of them and treasure them because they once belonged to Mac.

Like any new organization, we took a while to figure out what we wanted to accomplish and where our strengths were. Until recently, chapter membership was not large -- with a dozen or so members regularly attending meetings. In spite of our size, we were able to utilize our knowledge, skills, and our ability to think big to accomplish several enormous projects.

For example, the chapter hosted the 2003 NFBV convention which was held at a hotel in the Fair Oaks area. Because of our ambitious program agenda, we added an extra day to the convention in order to have time to do all the things we wanted to. For example, we invited members of the Sierra Club to host their "Sensory Safari" at our convention. Members of the Sierra Club had several tables loaded with displays of animal bones, pelts, and other touchable artifacts that convention attendees could closely examine and ask questions about.

During the next few years, the Fairfax Chapter organized several adaptive technology fairs, Transportation seminars, and several activities specifically designed to assist blind students. One student event that the chapter organized was a transition program which lasted a full day and was held at a recent NFBV convention. Since it is recognized by many that blind students moving from high school into college often have a difficult time making the change because they lack simple skills like ordering their own books or even how to talk to professors about making alternative arrangements for tests, Mary Chappell organized a day long program on this topic. Over 40 people attended this outstanding seminar.

Another student event the Fairfax Chapter is very proud of is the first Virginia Student Leadership Blowout which was held at the National Center in Baltimore in 2007. Nearly 20 blind high school students from around the state gathered for a weekend to meet positive blind role models and to build confidence by challenging themselves in confidence building activities.

In the last two years, the chapter has grown greatly. Last winter, the chapter had to move its meeting location to a newer one which was much larger and could hold all the new members.

Some other activities that the chapter has organized were: arranging to have students from the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind to have a tour of our U.S. Capital, go indoor rock climbing, drive a car, learn to overcome fear by breaking boards with our palms, learn to fire-walk across a bed of 1200 degree coals, and attend high tea at a local restaurant.

The chapter is currently working on projects for the future. For example, Brigid Doherty (one of our newest the members) is organizing a 'Blindness 101' seminar targeted specifically for those who are new to blindness and do not know what resources are available to them. I am working with Melody Lindsey (Director of the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind) to develop a second Student Leadership Blowout planned for October of 2009 to be held in Richmond. Having a program like this at a spot centrally located in Virginia will make it more likely to get student participation from every corner of the state.

Most people ask themselves, "What are we able to do?" Fairfax Chapter members ask: what do we want to do? -- Then, we do it!

Eastern Shore Chapter -- Spreading a Positive Attitude about Blindness
By Althea P. Pittman and Abra Jacobs

After canvassing the Eastern Shore, a long time Federationist, Althea P. Pittman, along with a long time resident of the Eastern Shore, Abra Jacobs,

decided to plan an organizational meeting to form an Eastern Shore Chapter of the NFB of VA. Names were gathered, and people expressing an interest were contacted. A date was set and the first meeting of the Eastern Shore NFB Chapter was held on March 24, 2001. The elected officers were William Weeks, President; Althea P. Pittman, Vice President; Abra Jacobs Secretary; and Tasha Drummond, Treasurer. Other members were Billy Chance, Lucille Kinsey, Beverley Bagwell, Emmett Bailey and Mark Edlow. The name of the chapter was established, the meeting dates set, dues agreed upon, and a Constitution adopted. Research, Membership, and Fundraising committees were formed. Each month the Research committee presented and discussed current statewide or local issues related to blindness. The faithful few worked to address discrimination issues facing blind individuals on the Eastern Shore.

At the 2001 state convention, Chapter Secretary Abra Jacobs delivered comments from our president, which were well received by our fellow federationists. This is an excerpt:

As a chapter we have been striving to break negative traditional beliefs and attitudinal barriers about persons who are blind. It has been the Eastern Shore chapter's mission and desire to change the community from believing that people who are blind cannot be productive citizens in both our social and professional lives. We, however, are proof that blind individuals can live long prosperous lives and can be as independent as we desire.

The Chapter members set individual goals to be accomplished which would enhance their quality of life within their home and community. Even through there have been officer changes, our goals have remained the same.

Public awareness of our existence has been one of the goals of the Eastern Shore Chapter in the past and the present. We have participated in various community activities such as Health Fairs, the Senior Citizen Spectacular, Diabetes Coalition Luncheons, Harvest Fest, and Senior Citizen Outreach held monthly at the Senior Citizen centers, etc. Our meetings are publicized in our local newspaper. The Chapter president participates monthly in the local radio show "Shore Talk". On occasions meetings are held at local restaurants.

Present officers are Richard Holley, President; Abra Jacobs, Vice President; Doreen Capers, Secretary; and Althea P. Pittman, Treasurer. Other Members are Anna Addison, Eulonda Addison, Arlene Jones, Vera Ayers, Tasha Drummond, Donald Matthews, Nancy Matthews, Charlie Poulson, Wilbert Church, Angie Ainsworth, William Smith, Greta Smith, Jazmine Collins, Jordan Jacobs and Audrey Johnson

The Fundraising committee engaged in several fundraising events. The most successful was Delaney Frozen Foods in which we raised over \$400 dollars. Our most recent innovative fundraising activity involved selling hand painted wine/water glasses and mugs with the "Whoozit" emblem. A set of glassware was presented to the state affiliate president, Dr. Fred Schroeder and his wife, as well as our national President Mark Maurer and his wife. We anticipated selling the glassware at the 2008 national convention; however, the project was delayed due to the illness of the artist. Nevertheless, future plans include a fundraising gala and an entertainment night spectacular.

While Increasing membership has always been a major challenge in the past as well as the present, we continue to grow by working together. We are currently trying to provide blindness sensitivity training to local school faculty and staff. We are also working with the school system and parents to increase and provide orientation and mobility training as well as Braille instruction for blind students. We will also be working to include our local newspapers in to NFB-Newsline.

Our chapter looks forward to future challenges. We continue to walk by faith into what our future can hold, and not by the sight of what today's barriers may inhibit. The Eastern Shore Chapter salutes the leaders of the past who have worked to lay the foundation that after 50 years, we are now celebrating. We are grateful to be included in the march toward changing what it means to be blind.

**Fredericksburg Area Chapter -- Bringing the Federation to an
Historic Place**
By Michael Kasey and Mark Roane

On September 19, 2001 the Fredericksburg Area Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia (NFBV) was formed. At the request of Michael Kasey, the Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) Outreach Department had mailed an announcement to its talking book subscribers concerning an organizational meeting to be held at the disability Resource Center (dRC) which is the local Center for Independent Living (CIL). The meeting was facilitated by Virginia Affiliate President, Charlie Brown; Virginia Affiliate Treasurer, Larry Povinelli; and Fairfax Chapter President, John Bailey. There were 25 people in attendance.

At our meeting on October 17, 2001, eighteen Charter Members: Lauren Bodkin, Roger Bourdon, Juanita Bowie, Charlie Brown, Clyde Compton, Hazel Compton, Lucille French, Naydean Hayden, Rex Holland, Joe Johnson, Louise Johnson, Michael Kasey, Katrilla Martin, Larry Povinelli, Arva Priola, Mark Roane,

George Thompson and Nelle Trautman, adopted the Chapter's Constitution. Officers and board members elected were President, Michael Kasey; Vice President, Clyde Compton; Secretary, Lauren Bodkin; Treasurer, Mark Roane; and Board Members, Roger Bourdon and Katrilla Martin. We recognized Arva Priola, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing specialist at the dRC, for helping during our initial organizational phase.

At our November 14 meeting our guest speaker was the Honorable Bill Beck, Mayor of the City of Fredericksburg. He welcomed us as the organized Blind in the community and asked to be informed of any areas that were not accessible. He said that he had limited knowledge about blindness but that he was anxious to learn and he pledged his support for our chapter.

In the fall of 2001, several chapter members attended the Virginia affiliate convention in Norfolk. The convention delegates officially recognized the Fredericksburg Area chapter as the Virginia Affiliate's newest member. A highlight for our members in attendance at the convention was the proposal by Robert "Mac" McDonald to hold the 2002 State Convention in Fredericksburg. The proposal was enthusiastically adopted by the convention.

On November 2, 2002, the Chapter received an American Flag from our congressional representative, United States Congresswoman JoAnn Davis, which was flown over the Capitol on September 19, 2002 to mark the first anniversary of the Chapter's formation.

NFB NEWSLINE added the Free Lance Star, our local newspaper in June 2005. Our chapter raised the funds to add the paper to the service and met with the Publishers to finalize details of the new service.

The chapter promotes the use of Braille through production of Braille bus schedules, restaurant menus and tactile maps of historic areas. In cooperation with the local library these items are distributed to interested businesses, government offices and museums. We have introduced "Braille is Beautiful" in schools and recognized winners in the "Braille Readers are Leaders" contest.

Our annual Walkathon held in the spring has been successful since 2003. The walk is a combined fund raising and community awareness event. The walk travels through historic downtown Fredericksburg, raises several thousand dollars, attracts about 50 participants and awards gift certificates donated by shop owners to the walkers.

The Chapter supports the state affiliate financially with regular donations and has awarded three scholarships for local Blind students.

Relationships with local community groups such as the Lions Clubs, Knights of Columbus, churches and schools have grown through the years.

After seven years the Chapter has grown to approximately 35 members and become diverse in its membership to include blind infants, blind students, parents of blind children and the senior blind.

Chapter members participate in the Richmond seminar, Washington seminar, State Convention, National Convention and meet with Congressional, state and local elected officials throughout the year to advocate for the Blind. We are proud to be the host of the state affiliate's 50th convention being held here in one of the most historic cities in America, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Chesapeake Bay Chapter

Our Chesapeake Bay Chapter entered the NFBV in 2003. This chapter had been a part of the Virginia Association of the Blind, and after learning of the activities of the Federation, decided to switch organizations and become part of the NFBV. Since that time, this chapter has hosted an affiliate convention, participated in our legislative efforts, and played a large part in our fundraising. The Chesapeake Bay Chapter represents the Virginia Beach area.

Prince William County Chapter -- Adding Membership

In the summer of 2003, the NFBV asked the NFB National office to help Virginia build and organize new chapters. NFB Corps, which existed for that very purpose, came to Virginia, and thus, our Prince William Chapter was born in January, 2004. While this Chapter has remained small, it has served an area of Virginia previously untouched by our organization. Through association with the NFB's positive philosophy of blindness, blind Virginians from Prince William County received their blindness training at two of the NFB training centers. They then came home then to help fellow blind colleagues come to grips with their blindness and remain in their community with dignity and confidence. This chapter has presented programs on transportation, formed working relationships with the independent living center in Manassas, reached out to seniors and fostered parents needing help getting appropriate services for their blind children.

Greater Williamsburg Chapter-- Continuing to Strengthen the Affiliate **By Corlis Jones**

The Greater Williamsburg Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind was organized in March, 2004 by Corlis and William Jones of Williamsburg. During that time, the Joneses were members of the Peninsula Chapter, and Corlis was serving as Secretary. The Peninsula Chapter met in Hampton, Virginia which is a 40 minute drive one way from Williamsburg. Due to the long commute and the growing needs of the blind and visually impaired within the Williamsburg/James City County area, Corlis, with the encouragement of her husband William, began plans to organize the Greater Williamsburg Chapter under the mentorship of Althea P. Pittman, then president of the Peninsula Chapter.

The first meeting of the Greater Williamsburg Chapter was held at the Croaker Library - James City County. There were seven people in attendance. During the remainder of 2004, members reached out to inform the community about the chapter by participating in the James City County Fair, the Senior Health Fair, and by getting out information about the chapter via newspaper ads and word of mouth.

Some of the Greater Williamsburg Chapter's activities include educating the public through speaking engagements, supporting the newly blind, participating in our local county fair, health fairs, etc.

The chapter has invited the James City County para transportation coordinator and a representative from DBVI to address transportation issues, the local election registrar to demonstrate new voting machines, and the affiliate president to speak about matters relevant to the members. Each year chapter members have joined fellow Federationists for the Richmond Seminar, the state and national conventions to voice their concerns and to learn more about how to advance the interests of the blind and visually impaired.

The Greater Williamsburg Chapter's officers are President, Corlis M. Jones; Secretary, Deborah Jackson; Treasurer, Jack Rhein; and Chaplain, Hazel Wallace. Other members include Patrice Rhein, Lenora Adams, Cathy Morrison, William T. Jones, Selena Wallace, Lisa Kavitz, Janet Kavitz, and Jim Kavitz.

The chapter meets on the third Saturday of each month at 1:00 pm at the James City County Recreational Center 5301 Longhill Rd. Williamsburg, Virginia.

Greater Springfield Area Chapter -- Reaching Out To More Blind Virginians By Joy Relton

The Greater Springfield Area Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia was founded in an effort to accommodate the travel needs of various individuals and to have a means to reach more blind people in the northern Virginia area. Efforts to form the chapter began in early 2007 with a group of persons who were long-time Federationists and wanted to help others in the area realize that it is respectable to be blind. After many phone calls, meetings, and emails, the current location for the chapter was found. We voted on January 8, 2008, to become a Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia. We look forward to realizing our goal of improving what it means to be blind for individuals working and/or living in the Springfield area.

Our first officers elected at that meeting were: Joy Relton President; Bernard Werwie Vice-president; Cleland (Mac) Vandevander, Secretary; Jeanie Wood, Treasurer; and Board members: Pam Johnson and Bob Hart.

TARGETED OUTREACH: FROM THE 1980'S TO THE PRESENT

Diabetics' Division -- Background and History **By Bill Parker and Dawnelle Cruze**

The Diabetics Division was formed at the 1987 NFBV Convention in Richmond, Virginia, with about 15 members joining. For the most part, membership has stayed at just about that number over the years. The Division's first President was Bill Parker, followed by Dawnelle Cruze and is currently lead by Bill Parker again. This Division takes calls from those seeking information about diabetes and how to manage it as a blind person. Due to this Division's efforts, "the Voice of the Diabetic," the widest circulated magazine on diabetes and blindness published quarterly by the National Federation of the Blind, is widely distributed throughout Virginia. Also, members have taken part in medical education classes, teaching seminars to first year medical students and health educators which showed how blind diabetics manage their insulin and continue living independent lives.

Merchants' Division -- Supporting Blind Business People

Our Merchants Division formed in 1991. Its major focus was on supporting Randolph-Sheppard vendors across the Commonwealth. The Division's first President was Ed Peay of Richmond. Under Ed's leadership the Division grew. Joe Shankle followed Ed Peay and his leadership brought vendors a stable retirement package along with health insurance. Joe and his colleagues saw to it that when the highway vending legislation was passed and highway

rest stop areas were made available to states for bidding, Virginia's Randolph-Sheppard vendors got their share of the proceeds.

For some time, "Around the Commonwealth with the Merchants" was published by the Division with Joe and Roberta (Bert) Shankle as its editors. Joe Shankle died in a tragic accident in January 1999, and following his death, the Division was quiet for a time. The Division is now, again active, and John Jones is serving as its President.

Parents Division -- Strengthening Resolve for Our Blind Children

In the early 1970's educating blind students changed dramatically with the passage of the "Education of All Handicapped Children" Act. Instead of blind and visually impaired children being automatically sent to the residential schools for the blind, they began attending neighborhood schools in their communities. With their blind children at home and the public schools often unable to give them direction about how and what to teach their kids at home, the National Federation of the Blind and its Virginia affiliate reached out to parents. Beginning in the mid 1970's parents seminars were conducted showing parents tactile ways to show the world to blind infants, placing canes in the hands of small children, advocating for Braille, and helping them to understand that their child's lack of vision was no tragedy.

By the 1990's parents decided it was time for a Parents' Division. Several parents have served as president, and we continue holding seminars and reaching out to new families. The Division has gained a reputation as strong advocates participating in individualized education plans (IEP) obtaining the appropriate learning tools for our blind and visually impaired students and giving parents a safe place to grow their new learning of blindness.

Student Division -- Building Our Future

As students completed high school and moved into training for paid employment, Federationists reached out to them to help them adjust to new educational settings. While many colleges and universities established "disabled student services offices", these were and remain ill-equipped to work with blind and visually impaired students. Consequently, the National Federation of the Blind stepped in to fill the gap. A national Student Division was formed in the mid 1960's. Our Virginia affiliate reached out to students throughout its 50 years through scholarship programs and an occasional outreach effort. By the 1980's students asked for and formed their own Division. The Division holds annual seminars, and now has a listserv whereby they give each other help and support. This Division has sponsored and conducted seminars which reach out

to new students and help them understand how to navigate the sometimes mysterious road to successful use of live readers, deal with the issues of getting textbooks and fitting into their education environment.

Through this Division, many students have learned of the benefits of nonvisual training before college, and as a result, several Virginians have graduated from our NFB training centers and come back to help their fellow Virginians gain confidence on the road to successful adulthood. Too, with student activities becoming more prevalent in Virginia, the affiliate worked with staff and students at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, "Blind Department", to form a NFBV Junior Chapter. VSDB students are active and take part in affiliate conventions.

Virginia Association to Promote the Use of Braille -- Preserving Braille Literacy By Nancy Yeager

Several members of the Virginia affiliate joined the National Association to Promote the Use of Braille (NAPUB) in the 1980s and early 1990s. They were excited about NAPUB's activities related to promoting Braille and wanted to start such a division in Virginia. The Virginia Association to Promote the Use of Braille (VAPUB) became a division in 1991, modeling its constitution on that of the NAPUB.

The new division started its first year with approximately 25 members. Their adult activities included meetings at the Rehabilitation center where members discussed Braille literacy and life skill activities. VAPUB and other NFBV members have also conducted seminars for blind adults around the state to share information and techniques for reading and writing Braille, mobility, meal preparation and other tools for independence.

VAPUB has always believed that to promote Braille literacy we must reach our youngest blind citizens and those who work with them. To this end, over the years VAPUB members have attended public school workshops and meetings of vision and resource teachers and other school personnel having responsibility for teaching blind students of Virginia. One exciting youth activity was conducted jointly with the Parents Division. It was a workshop for parents of blind children in which the keynote speaker was well-known author and mobility instructor of children, Joe Cutter.

Over the years, VAPUB has carried out a number of programs at the Staunton School for the Deaf and Blind. Staunton now has a Junior NFB chapter.

One of the most exciting programs that VAPUB continues to conduct annually as part of NAPUB is the Braille Readers are Leaders contest. Primary

and secondary blind students in Virginia are recognized based on the number of Braille pages they read during the School year. What better way is there to show our children that reading Braille is as important as reading print?

RESOURCES

A Guide to the Lucian Louis Watt Papers, 1921-1961

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James Branch Cabell Library
Box 842003
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2003 USA
Phone: (804) 828-1108

Virginia Federation of the Blind--National Federation of the Blind of Virginia
archives 1958-1992

National Federation of the Blind of Virginia newsletters, 1958-2008

National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute, tenbroek Library, Sound
recordings and Correspondence of the Virginia NFB affiliate
Interviews conducted with VFB-NFBV members

"Virginia's Program for the Visually Handicapped" by John Cunningham, 1940
"Published at the request of the Virginia Commission for the Blind"

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Thanks to Bob Burton, Services Director of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired for providing an original copy of the 1940 pamphlet cited above.

We appreciate the time spent by Nancy Yeager, Joy Relton and Sandy Halverson who interviewed Federationists who recall much of our history. Particular thanks goes to those who recall Virginia's activities as an NFB affiliate: Alan Schlank, Billie Ruth Schlank, Dawnelle Cruze, Gwen and Henderson Beavers, Marshall Jordan, Bill Parker, and Inez and Billie Wine, Federationists for so long.

Special thanks to our remaining founding member, Lydia Stuples, who recalled so much that occurred before most of our current members were born or moved to Virginia.

