



February, March 2025



# BELL-RANSOM FAMILY NEWS

## Happy Valentine's Day

**Sharing Family News and What We Are Talking About...**

**Our First Snow, it is Cold Outside but We Sure Had Fun!**



**Jackson and Logan Lockhart** enjoy snow for the first time in their lives when a winter storm blanketed their Baton Rouge, Louisiana hometown. Jackson and Logan are the sons of Robert and Heather Lockhart and grandchildren of Terry Bell.



**Ivy Luwel**, the daughter of Raven Luwel, granddaughter of Gary Bell and great granddaughter of David Bell, Sr and Dr. Florine Bell models her red coat and hat for a picture taken in the snow at her Cary home.



**Ava Harris** is well dressed to enjoy the beauty of the recent snowfall in her Suffolk, Virginia community. Ava is the granddaughter of Janet Britt.



**Skylar Lewis** enjoyed that the snow made the yard at her Rocky Mount home a winter wonderland. Skylar is the daughter of Attorney Dorothy Lewis and granddaughter of Dr. Arthur Lewis and Yvonne Bell Lewis.



The snow and record-breaking cold were enjoyed and endured by children of all ages. **Jackie Pyatt** made her annual snowman on the deck of her Fort Washington, Maryland home. **Linda Strickland** captured the beauty of a snowy night at her Durham home and **Keith Bell** shared a 7 am view looking out from his Roanoke Rapids home.

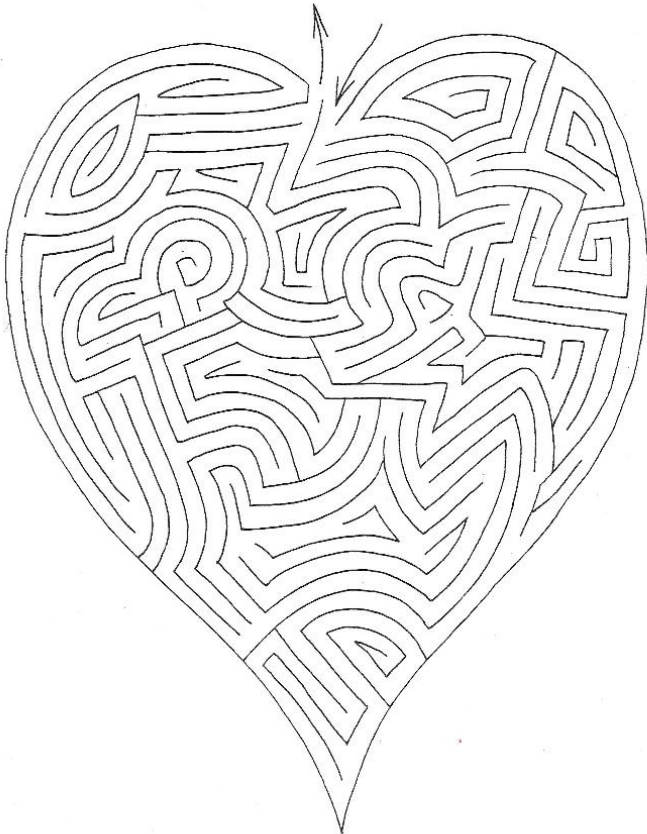
**Happy Groundhog Day! Will he see his shadow or not? Let us hope for an early spring.**



**LOVE** is in the air! **Roger and Mattie Cheek** have announced the wedding of their daughter, Curry, will take place April 19, 2025.

**David Bell Sr. and Rev. Florine Bell** celebrated their 62<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary on January 17<sup>th</sup> with dinner together. They plan a celebration cruise in March.

**Laurie Moore, M.D. and Hassan Moore, Ph.D.** celebrated their wedding anniversary on January 20<sup>th</sup>.



**A Maze of LOVE.**

**LOVE IS...**

A Miracle. It is kind and gentle.

Love is unselfish, quiet, and peaceful-yet loud with joy.

Love is patient and understanding.

It means talking and listening with an open mind.

Love is sharing and the willingness to compromise.

Love is charitable.

It is giving your time and talent for the welfare of each other and the betterment of your community.

Love is walking together-hand in hand.

It is facing life's challenges together.

Love is sacrifice and accepting change.

Love is savoring the beauty of the seasons.

Love is prayer. It is respect for the power of God and the wonders of nature.

Love is friendship and laughter. Love is filled with trust and faith. Love is unconditional and everlasting.

Love is a gift from God.

*By Jacqueline Bell Pyatt written in 2003 and printed in the 2005 Bell-Ransom Family Reunion Calendar*



**Lesa Cline-Ransome** is winner of the *Jane Addams Children's Book Award* for *They Call Me Teach*. Lesa is pictured with her award-winning husband, illustrator and author, James Ransome.

**Randy Pyatt** and his Waldorf Ford social media ads.

**Ethan Moore** playing basketball on his St. Paul the Great Catholic School team. Ethan is a ninth grader and is the son of Hassan and Laurie Moore of Woodbridge, Virginia.

**Sophia Pyatt** attended the winter conference of Maryland Association of Student Councils at Churchill High School in Bethesda, Md.

**Joydan Brooklyn Wellman** has a "Call Back" for Extras in a Tyler Perry movie. Stay tuned and ready to head to the theatre. Joydan is the daughter of Tashika Wellman and granddaughter of Freida Peele Wellman.

**The Family is growing! Massimo Alexander Owens** was born January 21, 2025, to Dr. Allen Owens and Giulia Owens. The proud grandparents are Wanda Bell Owens and Robert Owens.

**Rudy Pyatt** has published "**The Exercise**," Volume 1 of his **Homeland Security** series on the *Barnes and Noble website*.

**Emma Smith** is cheering for her Super Bowl bound Philadelphia Eagles.

**Deborah Hill** was dressed in Washington Commanders Football team clothes and had her home Commanders decorated as she cheered for her favorite team in the recent Playoffs.

**Linda Strickland** is serving as co-president of the Durham North Carolina Retired School Personnel. **Eddie Davis**, former Weldon School educator and 2019 Bell-Ransom Reunion guest speaker, serves as the legislature chair.

The active participation of many family members in the Northampton Halifax chapter of NC Retired School Personnel including, **Valencia Turnage, Margaret McGee, Beverly Underdue, Martha Sweatt Paige, Catherine Bell, Margaret B. Hawkins, Georgette Kimball, Dorothy Jordan, Jeanette B. Richardson, and Ermajean Ross.**

**Terry Bell** sang in the choir at the 2025 State Employees' Martin Luther King Jr. Observance Program and John R. Larkins Award Ceremony held in Raleigh. Terry is a retired NC State employee.

**Crystal Belfield** participated in her Rocky Mount Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc. Founders Day celebrations. Crystal is a teacher and member of the Edgecombe Association of Educators.

The Bell-Ransom Family Reunion is featured in the January and February 2025 editions of **Reunions Magazine**.

**Taylor Gardner aka "Tay Sap Rocky"** recently entered an Art Reflections contest at school. He is interested in the musical composition category and the theme was *Accepting Imperfection*. Taylor wrote an original song/ rap on his own. He was selected by his school to compete at the county level. He won first place in Fairfax County, Virginia for his category and is now advancing to the Virginia state competition.

**Randall Lewis and Skylar Lewis** are still talking about their visit to the turtle exhibit at The Imperial Centre for the Arts and Sciences in Rocky Mount.

**Ralph Bell, Sr.** and those wonderful family pictures he shares on social media.



# Happy Birthday



## February

2 Stephanie Lockhart  
2 Ava Smith  
6 Bonita Bell  
7 Ethan Moore  
10 Clarence R. Bell  
17 Whitney Jenkins  
17 Jacqueline Pyatt  
18 Pierce Sasser  
19 Martha Sweatt Paige  
20 Tashika Wellman  
22 Jarrett Caldwell

**And to all others with a February birthday.  
Enjoy your special day!**

## MARCH

2 Rev. Quincy Hawkins Jr.  
10 Ralph Bell Jr.  
11 Cary Joseph Bell  
12 Tala Gardner  
15 Earl Epps  
15 Abdul Rasheed  
19 Beatrice Gardner  
22 Micahia Bell  
27 Clarence Bell  
30 Yvonne B. Lewis  
31 Hazel Bell

And to all celebrating a birthday in March. Enjoy your special day!

Keep the sick, shut-in, and all of us in your thoughts and prayers. Among those reported for get-well prayers are:

**Arsine Cameron, Lee Strickland, Anthony Strickland, Clarence Bell, John Wesley Thomas, Maxine Hill, Diane Bell, Alice Pyatt, and any others that you would like to add.**



**Stephanie Lockhart**, in her campervan. is enjoying the peace, serenity and beauty of Washoe Lake State Park, NV. The daughter of Terry Bell, Stephanie resides in Las Vegas.



*Our deepest sympathy is extended to all who have suffered the death of a loved one since the publication of our January newsletter. Below are those reported.*

**Mrs. Claudia Anyaso** of Washington, D.C. wife of Victor Anyaso and daughter of the late Waverly and Louise Rawles

**Mrs. Marie Hendrick Pierce** of Clayton, N.C., mother-in-law of Therman Taylor Jr.

**Ms. Helen Ruth Mitchell** of Garysburg, daughter of the late John and Georgia Mitchell

*"God is our refuge and our strength." Psalm 46:1*





The theme of Black History Month 2025 is “African Americans and Labor.”

In Celebration of Black History Month: **The Bell Family Store** (The drawing below appeared in the Northampton County Museum, Inc, “Northampton Notations” 1990.)



The Store  
Bell's Grocery  
Jack R. Bell's Store  
Momma's Store

It was called by many names and for each of us it holds special childhood memories.

Linda remembers this:

The store was a place that I would go to play church with Aunt Barbara.

To eat “Monkey” food

To listen to the grown-ups talk

To wait to see what the cookie truck or the Mellow Ice Cream truck would bring.

It was a learning place for me.

I learned to count out money, to weigh the bologna and cheese, and to read the labels on the cans.

It was the excitement of the Bookmobile parked and waiting for you to find the best book to read.

It was the place to find the newspaper to read each day.

It was on the second Sunday of each month when it seemed, The whole Neck had come to celebrate after church at the store.

It was a cool spot in the spring and summer to drink RC Cola, To sit by the big fan or on the front porch, to get a block of ice, or to eat a cone of ice cream.

It was a warm place in the fall and winter to sit by the big pot-bellied stove and feel safe and secure.

It was the place to eat grapes and gingersnaps.

It was the smell of the oil on the old wooden floor.

It was the store that bought people together and they could buy “on credit” when they didn’t have money,

The store still stands with memories from the past.

Entombed inside of me so I can and dream about what used to be.

By Linda Bell Strickland

# History of Halifax County's prisons

BY FLORINE BELL

Each month, local historian Florine Bell provides information about prominent local individuals or places.

Although North Carolina was chartered in 1663 by England's King Charles II, 1630-1685, jails were utilized until prisons were organized. The delay was related to political, economic, and indifferences involving the administration of punishment. Finally, after the Civil War 1861-1865 amid the era of Reconstruction, the General Assembly of April 1868 unanimously amended the NC Constitution to include prisons.

On Jan. 6, 1870, almost two years later, with inmate labor from a nearby jail, a Central Prison made of logs opened near Raleigh's capitol. With an additional 14 years of inmate labor, a permanent 1.25-million-dollar Central Prison constructed on a 22-acre site opened in December 1884. It remains the state's oldest maximum-security prison, with an approximate inmate capacity of 1,004 male inmates. In 2024, the Division of Institutions, responsible for the care and custody of offenders, reported 54 prisons with an increasing population of 31,642.

Halifax County's former Caledonia State Prison Farm in Tillery, which boasted



Courtesy of the Roanoke River Correctional Institution

Caledonia Correctional Institute's name stemmed from the property's use as an antebellum plantation. Since 1890, inmates have worked on the operating prison farm.

nearly 8,000 acres of land and 271 enslaved workers, is the state's oldest prison. The workers constructed a nine-mile dike, which protected it from the floods of the (Moratock) Roanoke River. A nearby historical marker signifies the prison is located on the antebellum 1820-1861 plantation of lawyer-Governor Samuel Johnston, 1733-1816. Caledonia's name is associated with Scotland and the Latin word "Caledonii."

In 1892, the state leased the plantation from heir Henry J. Futrell, d.1866, a former overseer. The property was converted to a prison farm and purchased in 1899 for \$61,000. Generations of former enslaved workers who were now sharecroppers on the farm agreed to remain and work for the prison in exchange for shelter, rations, and an agreed salary. Caledonia was notorious from the

1800s to 1900s for its deplorable conditions, harsh punishment, overcrowdedness, exploitative prison, and "chain gang" labor. Inmates were leased out to private businesses to work on farms, railroads, highways, dams, bridges, and canals, with untold numbers losing their lives. Caledonia's female inmates were equally subjected to forced labor in tasks such as laundry, sewing, and other domestic work.

The 13th Amendment of the US Constitution outlawed enslavement of individuals except for punishment of a crime and conviction. Southern lawmakers took advantage of the law from the mid-1800s to 1900s by establishing Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, which mostly led to African Americans being frivolously arrested and sentenced to hard labor at prisons such as Caledonia. Imprisonment was

lucrative for the prison and the state's economy. In 1977, the law requiring inmates in North Carolina to work, G.S. 148-26, was enacted as part of Article 3 of Chapter 148 of the General Statutes. The law aimed to reduce prison costs while enabling inmates to acquire skills necessary for employment after their release.

One-hundred-two years later, on Oct. 4, 2021, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety finally addressed Caledonia's stigmatic past by renaming it The Roanoke River Correctional Institution. The North Carolina Correction Enterprise currently operates the 1,038 male medium-minimum capacity institution, and contrary to Caledonia's inhuman correctional policies, it treats inmates more humanely. For example, inmates now use state-of-the-art equipment for farming, forestry, processing

fresh produce, and other physical industries. Moreover, inmates are offered computer and internet technology, religious activities, on-site vocational skills, and educational classes through Halifax Community College and other resources. In addition, the Tillery Correctional Institute, a new minimum prison vocational addition, was added in 2021.

Halifax County's second prison, Halifax County Prison Camp 4425, located 1.5 miles Northwest of Historic Halifax on Highway 903, opened in October 1938. For the first 10 years, it was a medium security facility housing male misdemeanors awaiting felony charges. Afterward, it converted to a minimal security operation, making daily transports of inmates to work at Caledonia's Prison farm and laundry. In 1989, it reverted to a medium grade and again to a minimum custody (considered inmate honor grade) prison from 1993 until it closed in 1996. The prison's property was demolished except for the warden's residence and transferred to the county for public work operations.

Florine Bell is a historian and community leader. She is a founding member of the Ella Baker Educational Project of NC, Halifax County Underground Railroad, Edward Cheek House Museum, and a former Roanoke Canal Museum Adhoc Committee member.

The above article by Florine Bell was printed on January 28, 2025, in *The Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald*.



Support the Edward Cheek House Museum & Halifax Co, NC African American Center with a donation.  
Email: [edwardcheekhousemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:edwardcheekhousemuseum@gmail.com) Edward Cheek House Museum, Inc c/o Andrea Cheek Whitaker 5921 Dalhberg Drive Raleigh NC 27603





A reminder of how beautiful change can truly be.” Unknown



We salute **Cousin Freida Peele Wellman**, of the “Green Estate,” Garysburg. Freida’s creative talent and entrepreneurial skills are demonstrated in her **Décor 4 Joy** events decorating business. Freida is committed to the betterment of her community through service to her church and family. Freida is a mother and grandmother who models an example of abiding faith, strong work ethic, service, and love. Freida provides the table decorations for the Bell-Ransom Family Reunion. We salute all women of the family.

## Save the Dates August 8-10, 2025, for the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Bell-Ransom Family Reunion

Dear Family,

Can you believe it! We are entering the second month of 2025. This issue of Bell-Ransom News covers the months of February and March. They are both important history months. For Black History Month, Linda Strickland’s poem features *The Store* and in March, Freida Wellman is saluted in celebration of Women’s History Month. We have a lot in the family to feature and to salute. You continue to do newsworthy things. Thank you for sharing your news and for giving us so many things to talk about. Keep it up!

Plans for the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Bell-Ransom Family Reunion are beginning to take shape. The deposit has been made to reserve Kirkwood Adams Community Center for August 9<sup>th</sup>. Margaret McGee and Valencia Turnage with the help of a committee of cousins, agreed to coordinate reunion events. Contact them if you would like to help at ([mcgeem546@gmail.com](mailto:mcgeem546@gmail.com)). More information will be shared soon.

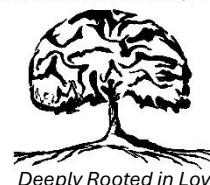
Love and Spring are in the air. Enjoy!



Jackie



The Bell-Ransom Family Tree



Deeply Rooted in Love.