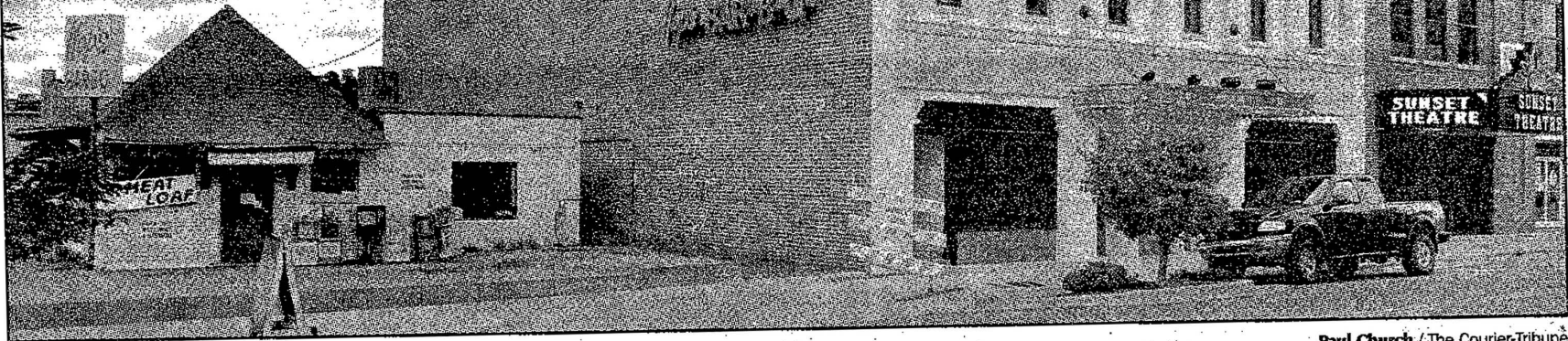


# Unrest didn't skip this town



Paul Church / The Courier-Tribune

**MEMORIES REMAIN** — Asheboro was the site of sit-ins in the 1960s, including at Hop's and Little Castle, once part of the Sunset Theatre.

By Chip Womick  
cwomick@courier-tribune.com

**ASHEBORO** — On Aug. 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom brought hundreds of thousands of people to the nation's capital. It is where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Two weeks later, four girls were killed when an African-American church in Birmingham, Ala., was bombed.

A story in **The Courier-Tribune** (dated Monday-Thursday, Dec. 30-Jan. 2, 1963-1964) highlighted the top local stories of 1963.

Topping the list was a petition requesting an ABC election in Asheboro. City council members passed the request to state legislators to approve an enabling act. No action was ever taken and no election set.

The second story noted that "an historic occasion" — the

integration of Trinity School — had "passed virtually without an overt ripple in Randolph County — to the collective sighs of relief of school officialdom, law enforcement officers and private citizens who preferred a smooth transition to adamant 'close-the-school' attitudes."

The third story, however, noted that the racial tension that had swept across North Carolina and the South had not skipped Asheboro.

"Most of the tension and unrest came from the Negro upsurge of demonstrations and sit-ins intended to wipe away the old order and bring about a new era in Negro equality," according to the newspaper.

"Asheboro's was the exact opposite of this — it was a demonstration by white youths."

The report notes that "tension began building" when Asheboro Mayor Robert Reese

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## March, plaque commemorate sit-in

By Chip Womick  
cwomick@courier-tribune.com

**ASHEBORO** — Sit-ins at two downtown eating establishments nearly 50 years ago will soon be memorialized with a marker.

The bronze plaque on a stone slab will be unveiled Saturday, Aug. 24, near the corner of Sunset Avenue and Church Street.

The plaque will read:  
**Sit-ins for Civil Rights**  
On January 25, 1964, sixty African-Americans were arrested at Hop's Bar-B-Que and the Little Castle, part of the Sunset Theatre. These sit-

ins were part of the national drive for integration and civil rights.

"This is something our young people need to understand — what their forefathers went through," said Donald Matthews, president of the Randolph County chapter of the NAACP.

A commemoration walk/drive will precede the unveiling at 9 a.m., starting at the Greater St. John's Baptist Church on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and ending at the theater, where a program is scheduled following a brief

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## Sit-in

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met with African-American leaders and then Asheboro merchants, "sounding out the feelings" of the groups on segregation in the city.

"All this took place in a period of seeming tranquility. Integration was moving along at a fair pace and it seemed to be meeting approval.

"Then on a Aug. 3 — a hot Saturday night — the tension reached a climax. Approximately 35 Negroes were attending the Sunset Theatre and all left in an orderly fashion around 11 p.m.

"But a crowd of white youths began building around 8 p.m. and reached an estimated 500 around 11 p.m. Then a car with five Negroes drove down Sunset Avenue and rocks and bottles were reportedly thrown and a shotgun blast rang out, wounding five white youth — none seriously.

"After continued unrest the following Sunday police finally restored order and the City Council amended the loitering ordinance to increase police power in case a similar incident occurs in the future."

In early January, the newspaper reported that a "five-member Negro group which claims to represent the NAACP Adult Branch and Youth Council as well as the Community Coordinating Committee of Asheboro has made eight 'recommendations' to the city regarding racial discrimination."

■ Bi-Racial committee be appointed to investigate, to encourage and dissolve racial discrimination in the City of Asheboro.

■ All restaurants in the City and those that serve the City on the outskirts of the City — open to all citizens.

■ That the city government refuse to sell license to eating establishments, and other businesses that discriminate because of race, color or creed.

■ That Negroes be given equal opportunities for employment in the City government. Such as: Clerks, Water Department, Fire Department, Recreation, etc.

■ All recreation facilities become desegregated immediately.

■ City Hospital become desegregated.

■ That more and better lights be installed in the Negro community.

■ That the city enforce the law to eliminate un-

sanitary conditions in public housing.

Mayor Reese responded with a letter published in the paper, writing that he had appointed a Negro Affairs Committee; that the conduct of private business was a matter left to the discretion of owners; that the Board of Commissioners had no discretion to refuse to issue a business license except as the ordinance proscribed; and that applications for city employment were accepted without regard to race, creed or color and filled by the best applicants — that 8 or 9 percent of the city's population was Negro while 17 percent of the city payroll was, including one policeman and two part-time policewomen, supervisors in the water department and youth working at the parks.

He wrote that the city did not have any segregated recreation facilities; that the city did not operate a hospital, but the hospital had Negro nurses on duty and did not deny entrance to anyone who needed to be hospitalized; that street lights were placed according to a uniform policy throughout the city; and that the city did not have public housing, but that health hazards per-

taining to housing should be reported to the county health department.

On Sunday, Jan. 20, approximately 100 African-Americans carrying a wooden cross held a silent march of protest through downtown Asheboro. Before the march, the Rev. W.C. Banks, the NAACP's state youth director, spoke at St. Paul's Baptist Church, saying that the organization was "here in Asheboro to stay" and would use a number of non-violent means — marching, picketing, sit-ins, lock-ins and lay-ins "until all walls of segregation come tumbling down."

The marches continued the next week and the first sit-ins were held on Saturday, Jan. 25, at Hop's Bar-B-Que and the Little Castle sandwich shop. Sixty African-Americans were arrested — 36 adults and 24 juveniles. Some were charged with trespassing, according to a report in **The Courier-Tribune**, and some with breaking an ordinance "which deals with congregating in a doorway."

Four sit-ins occurred at Hop's from shortly before noon until just after 2 p.m., with six people arrested on the first three occasions and 22 on the last. At 4:40 p.m., seven African-Americans

entered the Little Castle and sat down; when police entered, the story says, they stood up and sat on the floor; 13 people were arrested.

"The sit-ins attracted a large group of white onlookers who, for the most part, were silent, but several jeered the demonstrators," the paper reported.

A "slight scuffle" broke out between some white onlookers and television newsmen when white men tried to block the newsmen from taking pictures.

Picketing and marching continued. Another group of sit-ins was held on Saturday, Feb. 15, 1964, with 51 African-

Americans charged with trespassing at Reaves Walgreen Drug Store, the Carolina Theatre and the Little Castle. Two white men were charged with carrying a concealed weapon, interfering with an officer performing his duty and inciting a riot; one of them was also charged with using indecent and profane language.

The Asheboro sit-ins and marches, along with many others in many places, helped push the U.S. Congress to action.

On July 2, 1964, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted.

The following year, legislators approved The Voting Rights Act of 1965.