

Stephen P. Moore Jr., educator, rights activist

By Fred Rasmussen
Staff Writer

Stephen P. Moore Jr., a civil rights activist and educator, died Sept. 5 of a heart attack at Fallston General Hospital.

Mr. Moore, who was 84, was a prominent member of a family that has lived in Harford County since the early 1800s.

His 30-year career as a teacher and principal in Harford County schools spanned both segregated and integrated schools.

After the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling against separate education for blacks, Mr. Moore in 1955 successfully sued the Harford County Board of Education on behalf of his son, who went to a segregated school in Hickory.

"My father said I wasn't going to a segregated school, so in the wake of Brown vs. Board of Education, he filed suit," recalled his son, Stephen P. Moore 3rd of Bel Air. "I had been attending Central Consolidated School, which was built to simply pacify blacks. After we won the case, I attended the all-white Bel Air Elementary School."

"That took a lot of guts to sue the school system where you were a principal," said retired Judge Robert B. Watts, who as a young NAACP lawyer at the time assisted Thurgood Marshall, who was chief counsel for the NAACP, in pursuing the case.

Mr. Moore, who was born in Harford County, attended the Bel Air Colored Elementary School and graduated in 1927 from Frederick Douglass High School. He earned a bachelor's degree from Lincoln University in 1931 and continued graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University and New York University.

In 1935 he became the principal of the Bel Air Colored High School, the first black high school there. His parents, Stephen P. Moore Sr. and Hannah E. Smith Moore, had contributed half of the construction cost of the school, which was located on Hays Street.

"Mr. Moore was a great leader and humanitarian," remembered Geneva Pope, who was a student of Mr. Moore's at Bel Air Colored High School in 1944. "He was a father figure to the students and a real tribute to mankind. He'll be greatly missed not only in the black community but the whole community. We have lost a great man."

In 1949, he became vice principal and a teacher at Central Consolidated School. He taught for one year at Bel Air High School before retiring in 1967.

In his retirement he was a special assistant to former Gov. Marvin Mandel and served on the



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board of directors of Spring Grove State Hospital from 1972 to 1975.

He was a member of the Baltimore Chapter of the Guardsman, a social club, and the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity.

In 1989 he was inducted into the Harford County branch Hall of Fame of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for his lifelong commitment to education.

"He was a great reader," said his son. "And his other hobby was sports. He hadn't missed a Preakness since 1930, was in New York for the great 1958 Colts game and was pleased that he had seen Joe Louis fight and Jesse Owens perform on the field."

"He was one of the finest persons God ever created," said former judge and Baltimore City Solicitor George L. Russell Jr., now an attorney with Piper and Marbury. "He was very gracious and kind and the community is poorer for his death."

A memorial service will be held tomorrow at Ames United Methodist Church, Bel Air.

Mr. Moore is survived by his wife, the former Thelma Bernice Edwards of Baltimore whom he married in 1939; his son; a brother, Dr. Marcus W. Moore Sr. of Baltimore; a sister, Bernice B. Seals of San Diego, Calif.; and several nieces and nephews.

The family suggested memorial contributions to Ames United Methodist Church Building Fund, 110 Baltimore Pike, Bel Air 21014.