

Event to mark Hoxie School desegregation

John Bland
TD publisher

The steering committee for the Hoxie 21 Reunion is making final plans for the Sept. 4 and 5 events in Hoxie and Walnut Ridge. The committee has confirmed that U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln and State Attorney General Mike Beebe are making plans to speak at the Saturday, Sept. 4, midday gathering on the courthouse lawn.

Dr. Charity Smith, deputy director of the Arkansas State Department of Education, is also planning to speak at the reunion and commemoration. Other national and state dignitaries are also expected to attend.

Besides the public event on Saturday at the courthouse, another public event will be a Sunday afternoon gathering at Hoxie School's Crider Field. On Saturday evening, a dinner is planned at the Hoxie School to honor the "Hoxie 21" African American students who integrated the Hoxie School, as well as their families, former teachers of 1955 and former school board members.

The reunion will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, as well as the Hoxie School having the first challenged desegregation in 1955. The Hoxie events of 1955 have recently received renewed recognition through a documentary, "Hoxie: the First Stand," that was produced by David Appleby, University of Memphis professor, and televised nationally on Public Broadcasting Stations.

The Steering Committee for the Hoxie 21 consists of: chairperson Fayth Hill Washington, a 1955 "Hoxie 21" student then known as "Genie" Hill; Junior Briner, treasurer; Linda White, secretary; J'Bunta Washington, assistant secretary; Rosemary Hill, 1955 parent; Dennis Truxler, superintendent of Hoxie Schools; Ethel Tompkins, 1955 "Hoxie 21" student; Marlyn Tate, Hoxie School Board member; and State Rep. Don Hoxie.

The list of "Hoxie 21" students is listed below. Those named followed by an asterisk (*) are deceased. They are: Debra Barksdale, DonJean Barksdale, Yvonne Barksdale, Billy Joe Braxton, Clark Braxton*, Bobby Brown, Freddie Sue Henderson*, Fayth Hill, Wesley Hill Jr.*, Annie Bell Kelly, Chester Kelly, J.B. Kelly, Margaret Kelly, Willie Mae Kelly, Paulette Riley, Beverly Ruffin, Billy Joe Ruffin, Louis Ruffin, Mary Ruffin, Sally Ann Ruffin and Ethel Tompkins.