

Remembering Ada B. Evans, the First African American Mayor in Colorado and Her Legacy in Park County, Colorado

The South Park Heritage Experience

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The South Park Heritage Experience is an online series highlighting our heritage and history. This month we wanted to find out more about the first African American Mayor in Colorado, Ada B. Evans, who won in Fairplay, Colorado in 1974. We had the pleasure of speaking with Rachelle S. Burrell and Cheri Evans, daughters of Ray Evans and Ada B. Evans, to find out more about their family history. They provided us with some wonderful insight into their family and Ada's legacy! Thank you Ada for your

passion and drive and for being such a wonderful example for our community! We hope you enjoy, be sure to leave a comment and let us know if you knew Ada personally, we'd love to hear from you. If you want to see another great article about Ada B. Evans and her contributions, please see this [link!](#)

Can you tell us a bit about your mother Ada?

Ada Evans was born in Aiken County South Carolina as the 4th of 5 children. Our understanding is that no one from "the valley" went to college and many only got as far as the 8th grade. Most people in that area worked in the chalk bed or textile mills. But, mama was very determined and adventurous so she pushed through lots of challenges to attend college. She went to Benedict College with the goal of becoming a science teacher. She graduated Magna Cum laude from Benedict College with a degree in Biology.





What brought your mother and father to Park county?

After graduation from college, my mother went back to Aiken to do her student teaching and that is where she met the love of her life, Ray Evans. They moved to California then Colorado for job opportunities and to get out of the segregated south. They both grew up in rural areas and liked living in rural Fairplay.

You mentioned your mother obtained her masters while both mayor and educator, what degree did she earn and where did she earn it from. Also, your father was also an educator correct? How and why was education important in your household.

Education was very important to our mother and father. We learned when we were very young that they expected us to go to college. Our mother loved Science and teaching. There was the summer we spent in Long Beach, CA so that she could attend school there. She camped out and caught desert animals that she

later stuffed and used for teaching. She'd take us hiking to learn about rocks. We spent a few summers on the UNC Campus in Greeley so that my parents could get additional teaching certification. I believe that our mother's master's degree was in Science Education and my father's was in Music Education. We were constantly exposed to higher academics. They wanted us to be as independent as possible and they felt that education was the way to go. They had to work hard to even get the opportunity to go to college



Fairplay's black n

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Mrs. Ada Adams, the first black mayor in Colorado by popular vote, points to the election returns Wednesday at Fairplay City Hall after she defeated the incumbent, Ted Williams, by 20 votes. Mrs. Evans, a science teacher, and her family are the only blacks in the city of 500 persons. She says racial discrimination is nonexistent there.

If you can recall, what made Ada decide to run for Mayor?

We don't think that our mother had any interest in politics until she ran for mayor. She was always frustrated walking over the rough dirt roads and she wanted to pave some of the streets of Fairplay. In one news article, she complained that she broke too many heels on her shoes by walking over those rocks.

Can you recall some of the accomplishments your Mother enjoyed while in office?

We believe that she also wanted to provide a recreational facility and was instrumental in redoing Cohen park. We worked with her raking leaves in the park. She was an advocate for rural areas and worked to get grants for Fairplay. She felt like rural areas were often overlooked.

Our mother was very adventurous. She liked to try new things and see new things. She did attend events for civil rights before we moved to Fairplay. She was also interested in women's rights.

From what you can remember, what was it like living in Park County in the 60's & 70's?

The 60's and 70's were a long time ago and memories fade. We do remember traveling to Denver about every 2 weeks to a month to stock up on grits, go to the beauty shop, and to get anything we could not get in the Fairplay store. My parents were from the south and grits were like a staple in our house. Our parents were our teachers throughout our school years. We remember having to play the piano at my father's annual spring recital.

ADA EVANS NEW MAYOR OF FAIRPLAY



The Fairplay news section said that Evans' victory in the election of Mrs. Adams as mayor was a surprise. She was over 50 years old and had never before held office. Her opponent, Ted Williams, was defeated. In the race for mayor, Evans defeated Williams by a margin of 20 votes. Evans, a science teacher, and her family are the only blacks in the city of 500 persons. She says racial discrimination is nonexistent there. (Campbell Photo)

Living in a small town shielded us from many of the events in the world. The backdrop in the country was the Vietnam War, Civil rights legislation, equality for women, the assassination of JFK, and of Martin Luther King. She tried to explain some of the things going on in the world, but mostly we went to school and played. We were with most of our classmates from Kindergarten to graduation. Summers were very laid back and we were able to ride bikes and play all over town. My mother did attend a lot of political events in other areas like Colorado Springs and Denver. We remember dropping her off at the Governor's mansion. We attended some of those events with her. Also, since she was the first Black female mayor in Colorado we were interviewed sometimes for the news and she received letters from all over the United States. There was some pressure to be on our best behavior because we represented the town's mayor as well as African Americans everywhere.

Ada had a dry wit and both parents loved to laugh. Our parents were very

compassionate and generous. They were willing to help anyone in need and taught us the satisfaction that comes from loving anyone regardless of economic circumstance, race, or ethnicity.

Cheri was able to talk to Helen Strayer who was our mother's secretary. She commented that "Ada was a great person to work for and did a lot for the town." Further, Mrs. Strayer said that "Ada enjoyed being mayor and worked at it. She was always willing to help anyone who needed it."

Ada's last job before retiring was as a caseworker at the Department of Social Services. Again, she used her compassion and resources to help others.

