



Railsplitter Obituary



Carr, William J.

From the Waukesha Freeman:

William J. Carr was elected to the Waukesha School Board in 1968 and as vice president of the board in 1972.

Mike Carr, William's son, told The Freeman his dad was a very busy man.

"He had his thumb in a lot of different pies. He saw a need for a change and diversity as he did in so many of his endeavors," Mike Carr said.

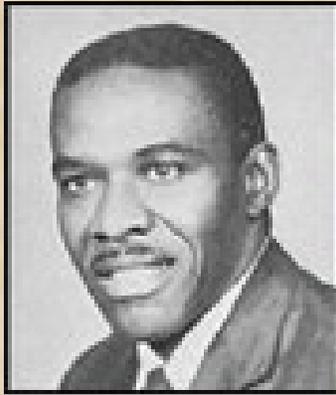
Former mayor Paul Vrakas said it is important to remember political figures such as Carr.

"We are a satellite city to Milwaukee and yet we didn't have the black minority and for a black man to come in and win an election was an important thing. It showed what kind of a person that he was," said Vrakas, who remembers Carr and his wife Mildred as gracious and cosmopolitan.

Carr's son told The Freeman that as a teenager, William worked his way through Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia and met his future wife Mildred, nicknamed Millie, around that time. He also worked in the steel mills of Gary, Indiana in his younger days.



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William J. Carr in 1972.



William J. Carr pictured with his first wife Mildred Carr in their 50th anniversary photo.

Mildred Carr died in 1994 and William died in 2017.

Running for mayor

Carr eventually ran for mayor of Waukesha in 1974 against Paul Vrakas.

Vrakas remembered mulling over a second 2-year term and thinking about his young family and the low pay for being mayor.

“My procrastinating left it easier for other people to decide to run. I kind of invited the competition. I then decided to run and it became a campaign,” Paul Vrakas said.



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One of his opponents was Carr. “We both concentrated on items of interest to the community such as housing, industrial development. We (Waukesha) were one of the fastest growing cities at that point in the state of Wisconsin,” Paul Vrakas said.

The pair debated community development and Paul’s wife Evie Vrakas said both focused on issues, not on personalities or ethnicities.

In an April 3, 1974 Freeman story, Paul Vrakas was declared the winner. The article says there wasn’t a ton of things Carr and Vrakas didn’t agree on. Vrakas got 56% of the votes against Carr’s 44%.

Paul Vrakas said in the 70s there was a lot of discrimination toward people of color but Carr was very well-respected, even during times of racial tensions.

“He was very schooled. His presence ... you knew he was in the room,” Paul Vrakas said.

The Vrakases recalled that Carr’s son Mike was good friends with their son Dan, former Waukesha County executive. The two teens were in a band together and became lifelong friends.

Dan Vrakas said he remembered his friend’s dad, who was wellrespected on the school board. Dan also recalled when William Carr ran against his dad for mayor.

“It was a good race. Those two guys had a lot of respect for one another,” Dan Vrakas said

Military career

Carr also served in the U.S. Army for 32 years. He began as an enlisted man, then graduated from officers candidate school in 1945. He served in Italy for three years during World War II, and was called back to duty in Korea from 1950 to 1951. After that, he was with the 84th Training Division and commanded of the 4th Brigade. In 1969, then-Lt. Col. Carr prevented a recruit at a camp from killing himself.

According to a June 28, 1969 Daily Freeman article, Carr spent two hours talking and listening to a 22-year-old trainee. The man held another recruit hostage at first but was talked into freeing the recruit. “He persuaded the recruit to surrender the knife he had been threatening to use on himself,” the article said.



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In 1975, Carr retired from the U.S. Army Reserve as a colonel. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal on the day he retired. “When Carr was in officers candidate school, he was one of only two blacks among 299 men who started in his class,” according to a May 2, 1975 Daily Freeman story.

The article added there were some issues with being African American in the Army in those days. The article said there were separate officers’ clubs for people of color. “A black officer was a rarity then. We were stared at,” Carr was quoted as saying in the article.

In 1975, Carr retired from the Waukesha School Board and from his position at the Social Security Administration. In 1973, he bought the Triangle Record Shop in downtown Waukesha and operated it for many years.

He and Mildred Carr had three sons and a daughter. “He was a great father and wanted to teach us the right way,” Mike Carr said.

Mildred died in 1994, and William later remarried to Kathy. Carr died in 2017 in South Carolina. He was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.