

The Florida A&M University College of Law has several special collections, but the most significant of those special collections is one that is on the fourth floor of the law library. When you look at it you will see several ranges of books that are outdated. They include cases, statutes, secondary sources and other legal materials that are no older than the 1960s.

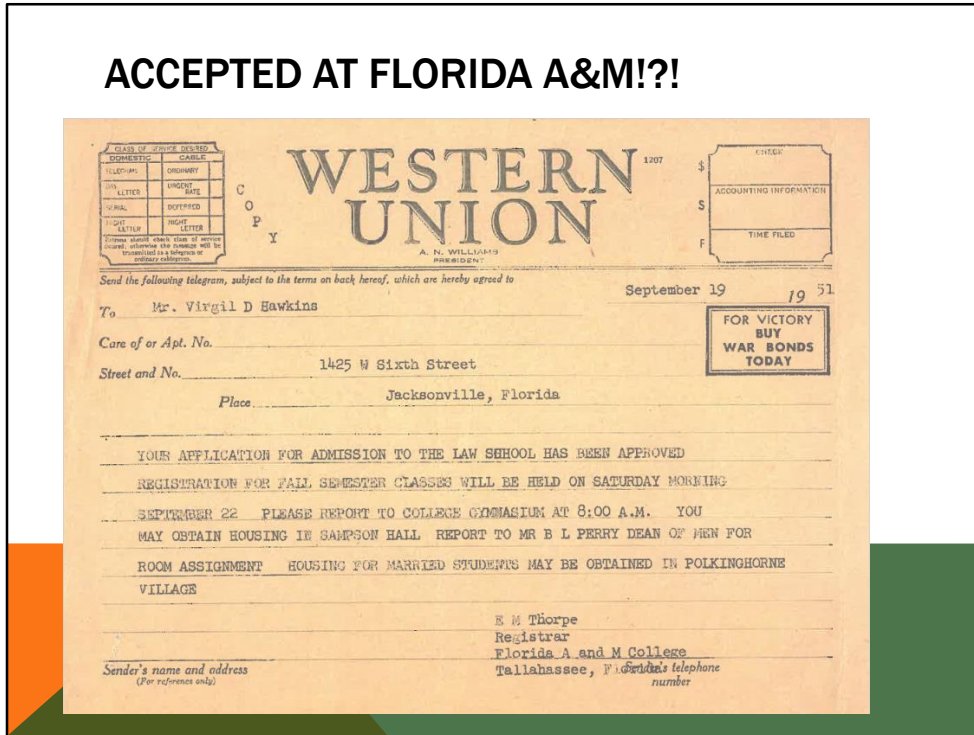
This collection, frozen in time, is named in honor of Virgil Darnell Hawkins, an African-American who, while little known, was critical to the creation of the Florida A&M University College of Law, and who had an impact on African American access to higher education in the state of Florida, as well as on the civil rights movement in the United States nationally.

## APPLIED TO UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA...

The screenshot shows the University of Florida Law website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the UF LAW logo on the left and a search icon on the right. Below the logo, there are several menu items: WHY UF LAW?, FACULTY & RESEARCH, AREAS OF STUDY, LIFE AT UF LAW, YOUR FUTURE, and ADMISSIONS INFORMATION. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: Homepage > Areas of Study > Experiential Learning > Clinics > About the Clinics > Virgil D. Hawkins Story. The title 'VIRGIL D. HAWKINS STORY' is prominently displayed in blue. To the left of the main text is a sidebar with categories: DEGREE PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM ROADMAPS, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING, Externship Program, and Clinics. The main text begins with the sub-header 'Paving the Way for Equal Rights' and starts the story: 'In April 1949, Virgil D. Hawkins, the director of public relations for Bethune Cookman College, applied for admission to the University of Florida College of Law. He was academically eligible and possessed appropriate life experience qualifications. For nine years Hawkins and his allies would fight Florida's Jim Crow laws, which racially segregated its state universities, until they were ultimately victorious in the U.S. Supreme Court.' To the right of the text is a timeline titled 'Timeline of the Struggle for Civil Rights at UF' with several entries and images.

The Florida A&M University College of Law opened in 1951, in response to an application by Mr. Virgil Hawkins, to the University of Florida College of Law. At that time, there was no access for African-Americans to graduate education of any kind in the state of Florida, and black applicants were routinely sent out of state to pursue graduate education. See <https://www.law.ufl.edu/areas-of-study/experiential-learning/clinics/about-the-clinics/virgil-d-hawkins-story>.

# ACCEPTED AT FLORIDA A&M!?!



Instead of a letter from the University of Florida, Mr. Hawkins received a Western Union Telegram accepting him to the Florida A&M University College of Law in 1951. Although the College of Law had essentially been created specifically for him to attend, Mr. Hawkins did not accept the admission offer because he viewed it as a segregated institution. After many years of court battles, Mr. Hawkins eventually went to law school out of state in exchange for a court settlement that allowed African Americans to attend law school and other graduate education programs in Florida. Because of the settlement, Mr. Hawkins never attended Florida A&M, but his pioneering efforts opened the door to the integration of graduate education in Florida. This slide displays a copy of the Western Union Telegram which was sent in response to his application to the University of Florida.

## FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY BLACK ARCHIVES

### MEEK-EATON BLACK ARCHIVES



The Carrie Meek-James N. Eaton, Sr.  
Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum

I first learned about Virgil Hawkins when Reginald Mitchell, a FAMU Law professor, asked me to help him find Virgil Hawkins's acceptance letter to the newly established Florida A&M College of Law. The Western Union Telegraph shown comes from the records of the Black Archives on the main campus of the Florida A&M University in Tallahassee Florida. The building the Black Archives is in what was originally a Carnegie Library that was opened in 1908. In 1976, Carnegie Library became the founding home of the Black Archives Research Center and Museum. In 1978, Carnegie Library was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. See <http://famuedu/index.cfm?MEBA>.

## ORIGINAL FLORIDA A&M COLLEGE OF LAW



This slide shows a picture of the original Florida A&M College of Law on the main Florida A&M Campus in Tallahassee Florida. Eventually, because of advances and gains in the civil rights movement, by the 1960s there were many who thought that there was no longer a need for a “separate but equal” law school in Florida. The original College of Law was closed in 1968, but it was reopened in 2002. We have not been able to determine who the original Law Librarian was for the Florida A&M University College of Law. It has been surmised that the Librarian for the main campus also managed the law library collection, since the original law school was located in what is now the Main Campus Coleman Library building.

SECTIONS SEARCH

# Orlando Sentinel

WEDNESDAY FEB. 28, 2018 OPINION PODCASTS SPORTS BUSINESS TRAVEL OBITUARIES LEGAL NOTICES

One of those reverberations is being set right on Saturday. An organization is honoring lawyer and former Leesburg resident Harley Herman for carving a place in history for the Lake County civil-rights fighter who forced Florida to let blacks in its law schools.

Virgil Hawkins, a black man from Okahumpka, filed a lawsuit in the mid-1950s that desegregated the **University of Florida** Law School — on the condition that Hawkins personally not seek admittance. In 1965, the Lake County high school principal instead earned a degree at the New England School of Law in Boston.

Because the school wasn't accredited, Florida wouldn't let Hawkins sit for the bar exam, but the Florida Supreme Court in 1976 decided he should be given a license to practice without taking the test. But the complex world of law was too much for the 70-year-old Hawkins, who found himself fighting charges of incompetence and mishandling client money. He surrendered his law license, and his health deteriorated. He died in 1988 after a stroke and kidney failure.

## A ROCKY ROAD TO LAW PRACTICE

After Mr. Hawkins obtained his law degree in the 1960's, it was many years before Mr. Hawkins. was admitted to the Florida Bar and allowed to practice law in Florida. After problems practicing law, he surrendered his law license and died in 1988. His friend Harley Herman, who is featured in the newspaper article in this slide, was praised for leading a campaign to restore Mr. Hawkins Bar License after his death. See <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/lake/os-lk-lauren-ritchie-virgil-hawkins-event-20160407-column.html>.

## ORIGINAL FAMU LAW LIBRARY STACKS



When the College of Law was reopened, a collection of the books from the original law library was returned by Florida State University, which had preserved the materials. Books were also returned which had remained in the basement of the main campus library of Florida A&M in Tallahassee, which was the site of the original law school building. Along with many generous offers of law books, the law library has periodically received books from the original law school and is grateful to all those who made this possible.

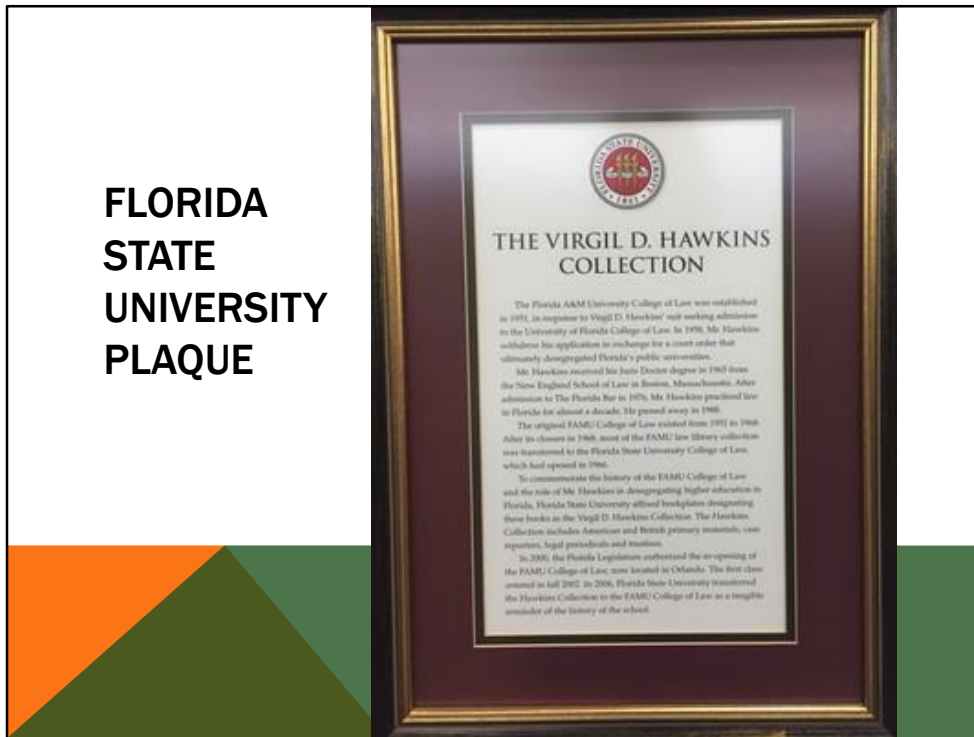
## PRESENT DAY VIRGIL HAWKINS COLLECTION



At the time though, some thought that books from the library of the original College of Law represented an ugly chapter in the history of Florida and in the history of the United States that should remain closed. However Grace Mills, the first law librarian of the new Florida A&M College of Law felt that it was important to have a tie between the old school and the new school, and that it was in fact inspirational that the books have been held, even though they were very outdated by that time.



## FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY PLAQUE



The Florida State University School of Law Library gave the College of Law a plaque for the reconstituted collection which states that “In 2006, Florida State University Transferred the Hawkins Collection to the FAMU College of law as a tangible reminder of the history of the school.”\*

“The Florida A&M University College of Law was established in 1951, in response to Virgil D. Hawkins' suit seeking admission to the University of Florida College of Law. In 1958, Mr. Hawkins withdrew his application in exchange for a court order that ultimately desegregated Florida's public universities.

Mr. Hawkins received his Juris Doctor degree in 1965 from the New England School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts. After admission to the Florida Bar in 1976, Mr. Hawkins practiced law in Florida for almost a decade. He passed away in 1988.

The original FAMU College of Law existed from 1951 to 1968. After its closure in 1968, most of the FAMU law library collection was transferred to the Florida State University College of Law, which had opened in 1966. To commemorate the history of the FAMU College of Law and the role of Mr. Hawkins in desegregating higher education in Florida, Florida State University affixed bookplates designating these books as the Virgil D. Hawkins Collection. The Hawkins Collection includes American and British primary materials, case reports, legal periodicals, and treatises.

In 2000, the Florida Legislature authorized the re-opening of the FAMU College of Law, now located in Orlando. The first class entered in fall 2002. In 2006, Florida State University Transferred the Hawkins Collection to the FAMU College of law as a tangible reminder of the history of the school.”

In 2017 FSU borrowed some of the books from the Virgil Hawkins collection for a commemorative display.

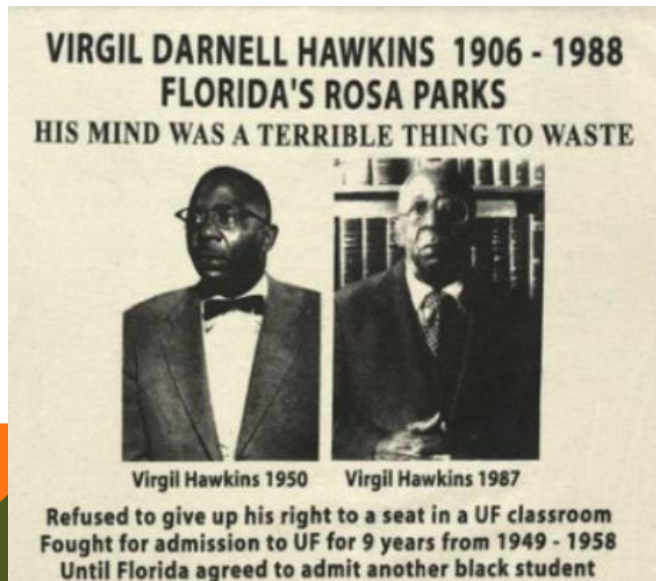
# VIRGIL HAWKINS DIGITAL EXHIBIT

[HTTP://COMMONS.LAW.FAMU.EDU/VIRGIL-HAWKINS-ARCHIVE/](http://commons.law.famu.edu/virgil-hawkins-archive/)

The screenshot shows the website interface for the Virgil Darnell Hawkins Archive. At the top, it displays the Florida A&M University College of Law logo and the text 'Scholarly Commons @ FAMU Law'. Below this is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'About', 'FAQ', and 'My Account'. The main content area is titled 'VIRGIL DARNELL HAWKINS ARCHIVE' and features a video player with the title 'Virgil Darnell Hawkins: A Lawyer Made...'. The video player shows a group of men in suits, with a play button overlay. The page also includes a search bar on the left and a sidebar with navigation options like 'BROWSE', 'AUTHOR CORNER', and 'Author FAQ'.

In 2015, the a bepress digital archive was created by the Florida A&M Law Library about the life of Virgil Hawkins and the physical Virgil Hawkins collection at the College of Law (<https://commons.law.famu.edu/virgil-hawkins-archive/>). The online exhibit includes a timeline of Mr. Hawkins life, a video documentary, and sample pages of the books from the original library. Students and others can see what it was like to research a legal issue such as abortion using only print resources.

## VIRGIL HAWKINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Our collection helps to ensure that Virgil Hawkins is still remembered in Central Florida. There is a Virgil Hawkins Historical Society and as recently as 2016 Florida Southern College hosted a Black History Month program in honor of Virgil Hawkins. The research request I received for Mr. Hawkins's acceptance letter to Florida A&M and started my exploration of this fascinating area of Florida history was connected to this event. See <https://www.dailycommercial.com/article/20160229/news/302299990>.

The Virgil Darnell Hawkins collection at the Florida A&M University College of Law Library stands as a monument to a tumultuous time in the history of our nation. We should be hopeful that it is, indeed, history. But what should never be forgotten is the dedication of the librarians who held the books of a library that was not in existence for over 30 years.

The Florida A&M University College of Law Library strives to honor the legacy of Virgil Darnell Hawkins through its mission to support the teaching, learning, research, and service to the community conducted at the College of Law as part of its social justice mission. Virgil Hawkins' story will live on as a testament to one man's dedication for equal opportunity in education, and the dedication of librarians to the preservation of information.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VIRGIL D. HAWKINS:

- Larry O Rivers, "*Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*": *Virgil Darnell Hawkins's Early Life and Entry into the Civil Rights Struggle*, 86 THE FLORIDA HISTORICAL QUARTERLY 279 (2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25594626>.
- Darryl Paulson & Paul Hawkes, *Desegregating the University of Florida Law School: Virgil Hawkins v. The Florida Board of Control*, 12 Fla. St. U. L. Rev. 59 (2017) <http://ir.law.fsu.edu/lr/vol12/iss1/3>.
- *Virgil Hawkins Story* - <https://www.law.ufl.edu/areas-of-study/experiential-learning/clinics/about-the-clinics/virgil-d-hawkins-story>.
- *The Virgil Hawkins Florida Chapter National Bar Association ("VHFCNBA")* - <https://virgilhawkinsfcnba.org/about-us/about/>.

