

BLACK HISTORY

Revealed: Coach's Pardon Letter for Wilmington Ten

By Cash Michaels
Special to the NNPA from
The Carolinian Newspaper

This week, as the world mourns the passing of legendary UNC Tar Heel Head Basketball Coach Dean Smith, he is being remembered as a trailblazer not only for his championship winning hardwood strategy, but also for standing strong for social justice, and against racial discrimination.

“He pushed forward the Civil Rights movement, recruiting the first black scholarship athlete to North Carolina and helping to integrate a restaurant and a neighborhood in Chapel Hill,” said Pres. Barack Obama of Smith in tribute.

But while many know of how Coach Smith recruited Charlie Scott as the first African-American to play Atlantic Coast Conference basketball in the '60's, and how he supported former Chapel Hill Mayor Howard Lee when the black man tried

against all odds to purchase a home in an all-white Chapel Hill neighborhood, it has never been revealed, until now, that Dean Smith also tried to use his considerable influence with then Gov. James B. Hunt in 1977 to secure pardons for ten wrongly convicted civil rights activists known as “the Wilmington Ten.”

In July 2013, while doing research for the documentary, “Pardons of Innocence: The Wilmington Ten” at the NC Archives, a Carolinian reporter discovered a previously

unknown missive from Coach Smith to Gov. Hunt. Dated July 25, 1977 on “University of North Carolina” letterhead from Smith’s “Basketball Office,” a copy of the extraordinary letter was made for possible use in the film. However it was never used in the production, so the letter copy was held until this week, after Smith, at age 83, died at his home in Chapel Hill Saturday evening.

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