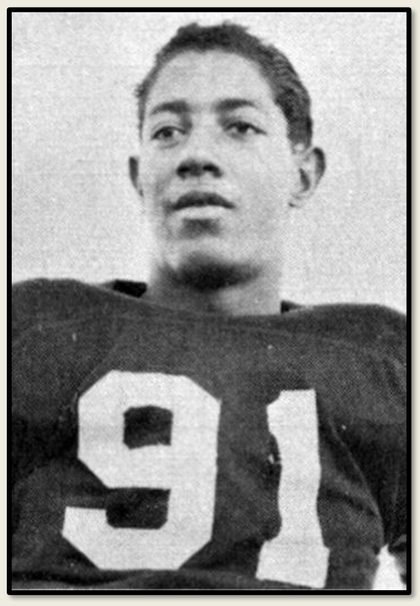
African Americans in Winslow: Scenes From Our History

Mel J. Hannah

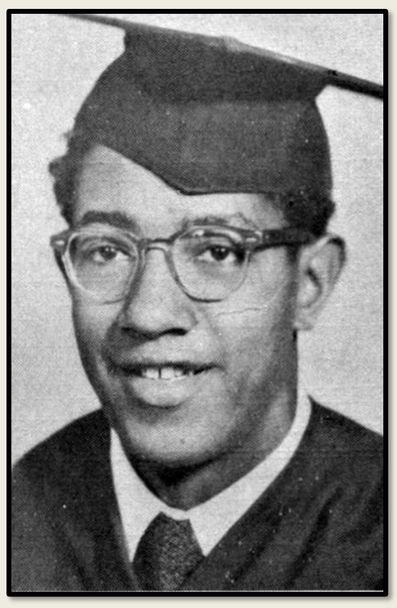
Robert James (1908-1969) and Mary Christine Morris (1911-1991) Hannah moved from Gatesville, Texas, to Winslow in 1935. They raised five children – Lois, William, Mel, Jerial, and Betty – on West First Street.



Robert worked for the Ames and Cake auto dealerships before he became a car attendant for the Santa Fe Railway. He soon became an oiler in the rail yard and then yard foreman from 1941 until he retired in the 1960s. Mary Christine did cleaning work at Dr. Wright's maternity hospital and other businesses in town.

Born in Winslow in 1938, son Mel J. Hannah was in the National Honor Society and played several sports (left, in football uniform) and saxophone in the band. He graduated from Winslow High School in 1956 (right).

Mel attended Eastern Arizona Junior College on a dual music and football scholarship before he went on to Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, where he also played football.



Mel settled in Flagstaff and worked for the US Forest Service and as Assistant Director for the Northern Arizona Council of Governments. He served as the first African American on both Flagstaff City Council (1973 to 1985) and the Coconino County Board of Supervisors. He served as president of the Flagstaff Chapter of the NAACP and vice chairman of the NAACP Arizona State Conference.

Mel married Barbara Ann Kedley in 1959 and had three children—Mel Jr., Marcellus, and Michelle—before they divorced in 1973. He married Shirley Stingley in 1975 and they raised four more children, Reginald, Derek, Ashley, and Brittani. In the 1990s they moved to the Phoenix area, where Mel finished his career at the Greater Phoenix Urban League as director of community outreach and job development, helping former inmates transition to meaningful jobs.

Mel was always engaged in the communities where he lived, serving on multiple public commissions and advisory councils including the Arizona Commission on African American Affairs in Phoenix. Mel passed away on January 8, 2023, at the age of 84, and he is greatly missed by his family as well as many colleagues and mentees.

At left, Mel and Shirley Hannah with Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano and Senator Barack Obama in 2007. Bottom Left: Mel and Shirley (center) with, left to right, Reginald, Ashley, Marcellus, Mel Jr., Derek, and Brittani Hannah in 2013. Bottom Right: Mel and Mel Jr. at a Spring Training game in Scottsdale in 2015.