

TWO AMERICAS • LUMINARIES • ACTIVIST

I Am Still Coming

Golden Frinks and the Edenton Movement

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Contribution Track • ERA VI • Edenton, North Carolina

Who He Is

Golden Asro Frinks — "The Great Agitator" — never worked a national circuit the way many of his SCLC colleagues did. Nearly his entire career was eastern North Carolina, run out of a single house in Edenton that visiting movement leaders knew as "Freedom House." By his own account, and by his 2004 obituary, he was arrested 87 times over the course of that career.

From Tabor City to the Navy

Born in 1920 in Wampee, Horry County, South Carolina, Frinks was raised in Tabor City, North Carolina, after his father's early death left his mother, a domestic servant, as the family's sole provider — the tenth of eleven children. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy at sixteen in Norfolk, where he first encountered the NAACP, and later served as a U.S. Army staff sergeant at Fort McClellan, Alabama, during World War II. Around 1953, while working at a Washington, D.C. drugstore, he led a six-month picketing campaign against segregated lunch counters — his first sustained organizing before he ever settled in Edenton.

Freedom House

Frinks settled in Edenton, Chowan County, by the mid-1950s, purchasing a home at 122 W. Peterson Street in 1958 that became known locally as Freedom House — meeting hall, protest staging point, and lodging for visiting civil rights figures. He served as secretary of the Chowan County NAACP branch before resigning in 1960 over the branch's reluctance to confront segregation directly, then built an independent, youth-driven organizing effort — the Edenton Movement — using sit-ins, marches, and boycotts that desegregated the town's courthouse, public library, and John A. Holmes High School, and pushed for the hiring of Edenton's first Black police officers. His 1962 arrest during theater-desegregation protests was, by his own count, the first of 87.

King Comes to Edenton

Martin Luther King Jr. visited Edenton in December 1962 to support the campaign, reportedly sending bail money after the NAACP declined to cover the jailed protesters — the episode both men's biographers cite as the start of their relationship. King dined at Freedom House on that visit and again in May 1966. In 1963, King named Frinks one of twelve national SCLC field secretaries, a position he held until 1977, and Frinks helped organize the August 28, 1963 March on Washington.

Williamston and Beyond

Frinks led the SCLC-backed Williamston Freedom Movement in Martin County beginning June 30, 1963, co-organizing with local leader Sarah Small — whose command of scripture Frinks liked to describe: "She can recite every chapter in the Bible [and] tell you where Hagar was when..." The campaign targeted the Watts Theater, Shamrock Restaurants, and the S&V Food Store through sustained economic boycotts, over real internal resistance from Black tobacco-economy workers afraid of retaliation. He went on to lead the 1968–69 Hyde County school boycott, which included a long-distance march from Swan Quarter to Raleigh and culminated in a November 1969 referendum funding the desegregation of Mattamuskeet School, followed by involvement in the 1969 defense of Joan Little and a 1973 march supporting

Tuscarora tribal recognition. A line attributed to him — "I am still coming" — is inscribed today at North Carolina's Freedom Park in Raleigh.

A Complicated Record

The record is not spotless, and leaving that out would be its own distortion. North Carolina Governor Bob Scott requested an SBI investigation into alleged misuse of boycott donation funds, and Frinks was separately arrested on December 28, 1968, for paying a motel bill with a bad check. Neither incident derailed his standing with SCLC or erased the movement's reliance on him in eastern North Carolina, but both are part of the documented record and belong in any honest account of his career.

He died July 19, 2004, at Chowan Hospital in Edenton, at age 84, after 62 years of marriage to Mildred Ruth Holley Frinks.

NC Local Lens

Frinks's entire career was North Carolina-based — Edenton, Williamston, Hyde County — but concentrated in the eastern part of the state, not Cumberland County. No Fayetteville connection is documented, and none is claimed here. Freedom House at 122 W. Peterson Street, Edenton, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on August 8, 2023 — the confirmed formal recognition for Frinks's base of operations. No North Carolina Highway Historical Marker for Frinks personally was located in this research pass; the National Register listing of Freedom House should not be conflated with a roadside marker if this entry is revised.

Sourcing Caveats for Future Sessions

Birth date: sources split between April 26, 1920 and August 15, 1920 — not resolved here; a primary record (census, enlistment, or death certificate) would settle it.

Williamston campaign length: sources give both 29 and 32 consecutive days — not reconciled; a contemporary newspaper account would settle it.

The 87-arrests figure: consistently repeated across independent-seeming sources, but ultimately traces back to Frinks's own self-reporting rather than an audited court-record tally — present as widely cited and self-reported, not as an independently verified count. Any "most-arrested activist" superlative should be dropped; no comparative ranking against other activists was found in any source.

The MLK Nobel-speech reference: the claim that King's 1964 Nobel acceptance speech alludes to Frinks as part of an "unknown ground crew" comes from a secondary account and was not verified against the primary speech text.

Citations

Chicago Notes-Bibliography style, primary and institutional sources.

1. NCpedia, "Frinks, Golden," North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources / State Library of North Carolina, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/frinks-golden>.
2. "Golden Asro Frinks (1920–2004)," BlackPast.org, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://blackpast.org/african-american-history/frinks-golden-asro-1920-2004/>.
3. "Source Packet for Golden A. Frinks (1920–2004)," K-12 Database, UNC-Chapel Hill, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://k12database.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2023/08/SourcePacketGoldenFrinks.pdf>.
4. "Golden Frinks Obituary," The News & Observer (Raleigh, NC), July 2004, via Legacy.com, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/newsobserver/name/golden-frinks-obituary?id=35465971>.
5. North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, "Freedom House," NC Civil Rights Trail — Virtual Trail, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/nc-civil-rights-trail/nc-civil-rights-virtual-trail/freedom-house>.
6. David Cecelski, "'For All the Poor People': Notes on Sarah E. Small & Her Run for the U.S. Congress in 1965," David Cecelski (blog), May 23, 2023, <https://davidcecelski.com/2023/05/23/for-all-the-poor-people-notes-on-sarah-e-small-her-run-for-the-u-s-congress-in-1965/>.

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