

## **The Sphinx's Profile of Anselm Joseph Finch**

A Positive Look at The Man Who Appears as "Principal Willis" in Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

### **#AnneMoody**

**NOTE:** Ms. Frances Alexander, retired school principal, recently shared with me a profile of Anselm Joseph Finch, who is believed to be "Principal Willis" of "Willis High School" in Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. The profile appeared in the May 1965 issue of *The Sphinx* (page 30), a publication of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. The magazine also features a poem by Finch titled, "GUIDE and LIGHT." Although many, including Moody, labeled Finch an "Uncle Tom," a review of his writings might lead one to believe that such a label was probably unfair and not deserving. Finch lived from 1902 to 1969. He established himself as a respected poet, speaker, pioneer educator and author. — **Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D., chairman, Anne Moody History Project**



Anselm J. Finch  
(1902-1969)

## **BROTHER ANSELM JOSEPH FINCH**

Bro. Anselm Joseph Finch was born in Brandon, Mississippi. He is a graduate of the Utica Institute, Campbell College, and Rust College, all Mississippi schools. He is also a graduate of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

He was at one time a special student under Dr. George Washington Carver. He assisted the late Principal J. E. Johnson of the Prentiss (Miss.) Institute in starting the Oak Park School in Laurel.

He later established the Finch High School, Centreville, Miss., which was the first high school in Wilkinson County for Negroes.

For many years he did publicity work for Bishop S. L. Greene, Perry W. Howard and the fraternal leader, John L. Webb.

He was one of the four Mississippi leaders selected by the state department of education to appear before the late Governor Paul B. Johnson, Sr., in seeking a training school for Negro delinquents and the acceptance of Jackson College by the state; thus creating a state school.

Bro. Finch has served as Vice President of the Mississippi Teachers Association.

He is author of the famous poems, "Wake Up – Justice," and "I'm A Negro."

While a student at Northwestern, Bro. Finch was one of the three representatives of the Department of Educational Psychology named to interview prospective teachers for the Illinois Civil Service Commission.

He is a member of the American Association of School Administrators, Phil Delta Kappa Fraternity, and a life member of the American Teachers Association; also a Mason and a Shriner.

Presently he is Principal of the Wilkinson County Training School, the largest of its kind in Mississippi, located in Woodville. This school opened with 2,667 enrollment.

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Finch died in 1969. He was buried in the Light of Liberty Cemetery in Brandon, Miss. A picture of his headstone can be seen [here](#) at FindaGrave.com

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