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# Exhibit at Earl Scruggs Center in Shelby, N.C., Showcases Photography of Gardner-Webb Alum

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Office of University  
Communications

January 19, 2016

## *Don Sturkey ('52) Recorded Civil Rights' Struggles, Other Historical Events in the Carolinas*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.-In a career that spanned 34 years, Don Sturkey, 1952 alum of Gardner-Webb in Boiling Springs, N.C., captured historical photos of desegregation, Ku Klux Klan rallies, poverty in the South and even an unknown Elvis Presley.

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Don Sturkey took photos of the Apollo 8 mission to the Moon, plus three other Apollo missions. Photo courtesy Don Sturkey and UNC-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library

An exhibit featuring his work, "Carolina Faces: The Photography of Don Sturkey," will be displayed at the Earl Scruggs Center: Music & Stories from the American South in Shelby, N.C., Jan. 23-May 15.

The award-winning Charlotte (N.C.) Observer photographer learned the art while serving in the Navy. Without any previous experience, Sturkey applied for and was granted a transfer in 1950 to the Navy Photography School in Pensacola, Fla.

"I was extraordinarily lucky," Sturkey revealed. "I had only shot one roll of film before the Navy sent me to photography school."

After the school, Sturkey chose to cover the Korean War on the aircraft carrier, the USS Boxer CV 21.

Discharged from the Navy in 1951, Sturkey headed to Shelby, N.C., where he had lived as a child. He worked for the newspaper, The Shelby Daily Star, that summer and decided to go to Gardner-Webb in the fall. He took all the photos for the school that year. In the 1953 GWU annual, The Anchor, Sturkey is listed as a photographer on the public relations staff.

After his year at GWU, Sturkey took a job at The High Point, N.C., Enterprise. In November 1955, he joined the photography staff at the Charlotte Observer.

"The group shared each other's skills and all our staff became top-notch," Sturkey assessed. "We were consistent winners in every national competition."

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He was the first Southern photographer and one of only two North Carolina photographers to win the National Newspaper Photographer of the Year Award. Beyond newspapers, Sturkey's work has appeared in Live, The Saturday Evening Post, Look, Ebony, Stern, and Time.

Sturkey retired as chief photographer from the Charlotte Observer in 1989. Just a fraction of his best personal assignments include the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, France, with President Ronald Reagan; the Apollo 8 mission to the Moon, plus three other Apollo missions; the war on poverty with President Lyndon Johnson in the Rocky Mount area; being back stage for an hour with the great musical legend Louis Armstrong; the presidential campaign of JFK across North Carolina; and Dorothy Counts, the first black student to attend Harding High School in Charlotte in 1957.

"I have had a fantastic life," Sturkey reflected. "I was thrilled that I was able to come from a poor home in the Great Depression to be able to do the things I did in the Navy, at Gardner-Webb and in a lengthy newspaper career."

*Earl Scruggs Center: Music & Stories from the American South combines the life story of legendary five-string banjo master and Cleveland County native, Earl Scruggs, with the unique and engaging story of the history and cultural traditions of the region in which Scruggs was born and raised. UNC-Chapel Hill and the Center for the Study of the American South are in ongoing partnership with the Earl Scruggs Center. UNC-Chapel Hill is an exhibit partner. Sponsors include the City of Shelby, exhibit presenting sponsor, and the Weathers Family Foundation, premium sponsor for "Carolina Faces: The Photography of Don Sturkey." For more information, visit [earlscruggscenter.org](http://earlscruggscenter.org) or call 704-487-6233.*

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*