

FAAF, BUDDY JOHNSON & THE FLORENCE BLACK SOX

After the United States Army decommissioned the Florence Army Air Field in 1945, the former military base resumed its purpose as the municipal airstrip known as Gilbert Field. For twenty years (1948 - 1968), the old film house on the property previously used for Army recreation and training films became the home of the Florence Little Theatre.

In addition to the theatre, another building became a popular local performance venue after the war; the old air base gymnasium.

Famous local jazz pianist and conductor, Buddy Johnson, and his sister, Ella, were the headlining performers at a concert held there in April, 1951. Buddy Johnson was born Woodrow Wilson Johnson in Darlington, SC in 1915. After graduating from Mayo High School and moving to New York City, he was picked up by Decca Records.

He soon began recording and performing at the Savoy Ball Room and Apollo Theaters in Harlem. Johnson composed many hit songs, including the jazz standards "Since I fell for You" and "Walk 'Em".

The concert at the gymnasium was presented by the Florence Black Sox, an all African American segregated baseball team organized around 1930 who held their games at the American Legion Field on Oakland Avenue. The Florence White Sox, who also played at the same stadium, were an all white team.