When I first met him in 1947 he was already 64 years old and was just becoming known - and looked at askance - for his support of social justice for blacks. He seemed "feisty," but had none of the short temper that word suggests. His voice was deep, his speech deliberate. Short of stature, he stood erect as if always at attention.

He was not a lovable man - children did not clamber onto his lap. But much of his concern was for the welfare of children. In 1945 he became the first white member of the board of Greenbriar Children's Center, now a thriving institution, then only the vision of a home for homeless black children. And after he had turned away from the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce, he maintained his Masonic ties, he told me; because of the work done for crippled children by the Shriner's Hospital.

When he left the Board of Education, after serving 18 years, he was named "honorary president." And in 1955 a black school was named for him. (Many smirked at this and thought it poetic justice.)

During the sixties he became a leader in the bi-racial Chatham Council on Human Relations, which pressed for an end to segregation in the schools and in public places. There were mutterings among his old colleagues at his foolishness, of his disloyalty to old traditions, of his "troublemaking." Lesser folk called him a Communist, a "mongrel." He knew the anonymous letter, the vituperative midnight telephone call. He was spit upon.

This was the decade - remember? - when Governor Vandiver, speaking to a convention of public health workers in Savannah, insisted that black members of the group "either sit by themselves or stay out of the auditorium." It was the decade when Bo Callaway ran for Congress (and was elected) promising to work for repeal of the civil rights laws. For a long time it seemed that history was not on Frank Spencer's side.

But history caught up with him. And when Captain Spencer died the hard path he had chosen for his last thirty years had become a well-trod road. The prophet was finally honored in his city.