

H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College

Dr. Gwendolyn M. Patton, Archivist

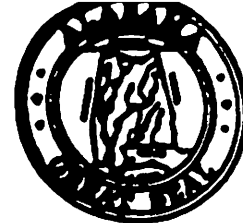
Division of Library and Archives

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Montgomery, Alabama 36108

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October 3, 2000

Dear Karen,

Below are the questions. Can you have the answers by October 31, 2000? Gwen

1. Where was Coach born? In his home? By a mid-wife?
2. What was his boyhood address?
3. Who were his childhood friends?
4. Who were his parents?
5. What line of work did his parents do?
6. Names of brothers and sisters?
7. Was Coach in the military? Branch?
8. What year did he marry and to whom?
9. How many children? Names.
10. Where did the young family reside? Give all addresses.
11. What college(s) did he attend? Years? Major(s)? Degree(s)?
12. What fraternities were he a member? Offices held?
13. What social organizations? Offices held?
14. What political/civic organizations? Offices held?
15. What Church was he a member? Offices held?
16. What jobs/positions did he hold?
17. What businesses did he own or was a partner therein?
18. Was he a farmer? Did he own farming lands? Cattle? Where?

Karen if you think there is any other information I should know about your grandfather, please feel free to

October 31, 2000

Dear Gwen:

Karen asked for my help ^{to} provide you the information that you requested

1. Where was Mr. Lewis born? In Montgomery, AL ; don't know but would suspect that a midwife was used. 2. He grew up on the west side of Montgomery and was raised by Mr. & Mrs. Obe Thomas. 4. His parents were Jerry and Lula Lewis. 5. Don' know what kind of work his parents did. The Thomas ' did a little gardening and I think they had a cow or two. 6. He had three sisters, Roberta Lewis Mitchell, Janie and Corinne Lewis. He had no brothers. He was the only boy and the youngest of the family. 7. Mr. Lewis was never in the military. 8. He was married to Jule Adelaide Clayton in 1935. 9. They had one child, Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. 10. The family resided in Patterson Court until they moved to 801 Bolivar Street in the early forties where he remained basically until his death. 11. He attended State Normal School in Montgomery, AL and Fisk University, Nashville, TN graduating in the class of 1929.. Don't know what the major was. He did some post-graduate work at New York University in the mid-forties. 12. He was a charter member of the graduate chapter of Alpha Upsilon Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity,

Montgomery, AL ; don't know about the offices held. 13. Don't know about the social organizations other than the Elks Lodge and Shriners. 14. Political /Civic organizations you have better information that I have on that Gwen. 15. He attended Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and St. John A.M.E. Church. 16. He was a librarian at Alabama State Teachers College (presently Ala, State University); he was football, track and baseball coach , also. Mr. Lewis was very active in voter registration all over middle and south Alabama before it was popular. From that experience came the election to the Alabama State House of Representatives and United States Federal Marshall of the Middle District of Alabama. 17.Mr. Lewis owned and operated the Citizens' Club which was an off-shot of his voter registration activities. In order to be a member of the Citizens' Club, you had to be a registered voter. If you were not a registered voter, you had to fill out the appropriate forms and arrange to become a registered voter as soon as possible. He was also involved in the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home, Inc. which was founded by his wife's parents and the Ross Family. 18 He was a farmer in his youth. He owned farm land and cattle in Montgomery and Elmore Counties

Gwen, I have given all the answers that I have. Most of this , Karen would not have known, which is why she came to me for help. Hope this helps you with what you are writing and putting together,

PREPARED BY DAUGHTER,
MRS. ELEANOR LEWIS DAWKINS

THE HONORABLE RUFUS A. LEWIS COLLECTION

Division of Library and Archives

The Honorable Rufus A. Lewis, born November 30, 1906, in Montgomery County, began an earnest and consistent Voting Rights Drive in the early 1940s. In an October 8, 1995, issue of U.S. NEWS REPORT, the article states: "Back in the '40s, Rufus Lewis became obsessed with voting rights. An entire generation of Montgomery (B)lacks say that Lewis, who is barely known today, is the reason they first voted." We at Trenholm State Technical College are turning this around as we sought to establish our voting Rights Archives with the Lewis' papers and artifacts being our first collection. "Today's generation and those to come hereafter will know that the HONORABLE RUFUS A. LEWIS IS THE FATHER OF MONTGOMERY'S VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT," said Archivist Gwen Patton.

Mr. Lewis is a graduate of Fisk University and served as football coach at Alabama State University. He, also, was a partner in the Ross and Clayton Funeral Home business. In 1952, he opened the "Citizens' Club," a night club for African Americans. The primary purpose of the night club was to motivate Black citizens in a social setting to register to vote. Most members were already registered voters, and their continuing membership in the Club was to help others become registered voters. Many members held "Citizenship Schools" in their homes, where Black people learned how to fill out the literacy test, the pre-requisite to becoming a registered voter.

In 1960, Mr. Lewis was one of the founders and the first Montgomery County Chapter President of the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC). In 1976, U.S. President Jimmy Carter appointed Mr. Lewis to serve as an United States Marshal, the first Black marshal ever in Alabama.

(Over)

Below is a listing of Lewis' holdings in the College's Archives:

Call Number	Title	Barcode
AR 001 LEW Com Sto	Parks and Recreation Board	402920
AR 001 LEW Com Sto	U.S. Presidents, Senators, G	402918
AR 001 LEW Com Sto	Organizations	402919
AR 001 LEW DB 4	Correspondences	402911
AR 001 LEW DB 1	Voters' Registration	402907
AR 001 LEW DB 2	Voters' Registration	402908
AR 001 LEW DB 3	Voters' Registration/Political	402909
AR 001 LEW DB 4	Correspondences	402910
AR 001 LEW Drop-fro	Books, Magazines, Reel Tapes	402916
AR 001 LEW Drop-fro	Scrapbook	402917
AR 001 LEW News Bo	Newspapers	402915
AR 001 LEW Post B	Poster, Newspapers, Organizations	402912

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DR. GWEN PATTON, ARCHIVIST

Rufus A. Lewis: The Father of Montgomery and Central Alabama's
Voting Rights Movement
Dr. Gwen Patton
Alabama State Archives Symposium
July 21, 2001

Rufus Andrew Lewis was born on November 1906, to the late Lula and Jerry Lewis in Montgomery, Alabama. He was the youngest of four children. His sisters, Roberta, Janie and Corrine preceded him in death. He grew up on the west side of Montgomery and was raised by Mr. & Mrs. Obe Thomas, who were farmers.

His early education was in Montgomery County, where he attended Alabama State Normal and Bethel College. He was a graduate of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, where he earned a baccalaureate degree with a major in physical education and a minor in library science in 1929.

Lewis married Jule Adelaide Clayton in 1935, and they had one daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. The young family resided in Patterson Court until they had a home built and moved to 801 Bolivar Street in the early 1940s. Mrs. Jule Lewis passed in 1955. The home-house is now the residence of his granddaughter, Ms. Karen Dawkins.

• Lewis joined the faculty at Alabama State Teachers College, previously the Alabama State Normal School, in 1936. There he served as athletic coach and as assistant librarian. Soon afterwards, Lewis was respectfully and affectionately called "Coach Lewis" for his successfully strategies as football, track and baseball coach.

Though Lewis was never in the military, it disheartened him that Black World War I Veterans could not become registered voters. The

infamous “grandfather clause” denied them this citizenship right. This law stipulated that your grandfather had to have been a registered voter, an impossibility for most Black men because their grandfathers were enslaved as property. During the 1930s, Lewis surely thought that “educated” people ought to be granted citizenship rights via the vote. When the franchise was still denied, Lewis launched an earnest and consistent voting rights drive. He established a “Citizenship Club” for students at the College. By the early “1940s, Rufus Lewis became obsessed with voting rights. An entire generation of Montgomery (B)lacks say that Lewis...is the reason they first voted.” (U.S. NEWS REPORT,10/8/95).

Lewis set up “citizenship schools,” especially for veterans and educators, as clinics to teach prospective voters how to fill out the so-called “literacy test,” the pre-requisite to become a registered voter. Lewis believed that if a man could go to war and fight for his country, he should be entitled to vote. The Veterans’ Schools were at St. Jude and Booker T. Washington High Schools. Teachers and ordinary people attended “citizenship schools” in the homes of people who had been trained by Lewis in “voting clinics.” Lewis was an incredible and detailed organizer. Precision, efficiency and thoroughness were his calling cards. Indeed, he kept voting registration organizing forms in the trunk of his car, and at every opportunity he would attempt to get people to join up for citizenship school. He organized neighborhoods block by block, each with a “block captain.”

Already a business man in his wife’s family business, Ross and Clayton Funeral Home, Lewis opened the “Citizens’ Club” in 1952, a social nightclub where members were registered voters or enrolled in “citizenship schools.”

Page 3, Lewis
Patton, State Archives symposium
7/21/01

Lewis was a member of Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, a charter member of the graduate chapter of Alpha Upsilon Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Southern Pride Lodge #431, A. A. Peters Masonic Lodge #900, and National Urban League.

His expert organizing skills and his insight to human leadership potential prompted him to nominate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to be the spokesman for the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization that spearheaded the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-57). Lewis later became Chair of the Transportation Committee that operated with military precision (JoAnn Robinson's THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT AND THE WOMEN WHO STARTED IT.)

His political acumen was awesome. He co-founded (1960) the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC), the Black caucus of the Democratic Party and was the first president of the Montgomery County Democratic Conference, 2nd Congressional District of the Democratic Conference. He, also, co-founded the East Montgomery Branch of the NAACP and the New Southland Corporation, a group whose purpose was to help save land for Black landowners and to help with the proper utilization and management of that land.

White political candidates curried Rufus' favor. Rufus through his relentless efforts had harnessed the "Black Bloc" using the strategies of "screening committees" and passing out a "yellow ballot" as a guide for Black voters. "Many (W)hites think they know Lewis," said Joe Azbell in a 3/7/74 issue of THE MONTGOMERY INDEPENDENT. "But, that's where they are fooled. Lewis has a poker face when he talks with (W)hites. He is oriented 100% toward the (B)lack community," Azbell

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As a result of Lewis political prowess, he was appointed to the Montgomery Parks and Recreation Board and served on the Board of Directors of the Montgomery Community Action Committee. He was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1976, and resigned from that position when U.S. President Jimmy Carter appointed him as U.S. Marshal, the first Black ever from the Middle District of Alabama.

Lewis not only had shrewd insight, but also a keen foresight. Lewis predicted after the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, where he was in attendance in the Rose Garden of the White House, by President Lyndon B. Johnson, that Blacks would exercise political muscle and get themselves elected, particularly in local elections. Another foresight is that Lewis lobbied to change the name of Jackson Avenue to that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. This may very well become a reality today. It is a reality that the Lewis' residence address will change from 801 Bolivar Street to that of Rufus A. Lewis Lane. A public library in Montgomery was named in his honor in 1994.

Lewis retired as U.S. Marshal in 1980, and returned to his life of business, farming and cattle raising. He was still considered the Dean of Black Politics and continued to counsel young Blacks interested in political power.

The Honorable Rufus A. Lewis passed on August 19, 1999. He was 93 years old. The Lewis Collection of more than 20,000 papers, manuscripts and small artifacts are housed in the archives at the H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College. -30-

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Rufus A. Lewis

Rufus Andrew Lewis was born on November 30, 1906 (d. 1999), to the late Lula and Jerry Lewis in Montgomery, Alabama. He was the youngest of four children. His sisters, Roberta, Janie and Corrine preceded him in death. He grew up on the west side of Montgomery and was raised by Mr. & Mrs. Obe Thomas, who were farmers.

His early education was in Montgomery County, where he attended Alabama State Laboratory High School and Alabama State Teachers' Junior College. He was a graduate of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, where he earned an A. B. Degree in Business Administration in 1931.

Lewis taught one year at Conecuh County Training School in Evergreen, Alabama and one year at People's Village School in Mt. Meigs, Alabama.

Lewis joined the faculty at Alabama State Teachers' College, now Alabama State University, in 1933. There he served as athletic coach and as assistant librarian. Lewis was promoted to Head Coach for Football and Track in 1934, and was respectfully and affectionately called "Coach Lewis" for his outstanding winning records. While on the faculty, Lewis was a Charter-Member (1934) of the graduate chapter of Alpha Upsilon Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

In 1943, Lewis was called to serve in World War II; however, due to an injury sustained from a previous automobile accident, Lewis was ineligible for military/combat service. To demonstrate his patriotism, Lewis worked as a civilian with the National Defense Project for 2 years.

Lewis married Jule Adelaide Clayton in 1935, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William and Frazzie Clayton. The Lewis couple

had one daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. The young family resided in Patterson Court until they moved into the Clayton Family Home, 801 Bolivar Street, upon the death of William Clayton. Mrs. Jule Clayton Lewis met with a fatal automobile accident in 1958, while in route to a National Negro Business Women's conference. The home-house is now the residence of the grand-daughter, Ms. Karen Dawkins.

Lewis was always concerned about Black people having the right to vote. The franchise to Lewis was the essence of what it meant to be a first-class citizen. He was especially disturbed that Black people who could read and write and those who fought in World Wars to "save democracy and to make the world safe for democracy" could not obtain the right to vote. When the franchise was continually denied to Black citizens, Lewis launched an earnest and consistent voting rights drive. He worked with students at Alabama State Laboratory High School's "Citizenship Club" in 1938 and thereafter. By the early "1940s, Rufus Lewis became obsessed with voting rights. An entire generation of Montgomery (B)lacks say that Lewis...is the reason they first voted." (U.S. News Report, 10/8/95).

Lewis set up "citizenship schools," especially for veterans, as clinics to teach prospective voters how to fill out the so-called "literacy test," the pre-requisite to become a registered voter. Lewis believed that if a man could go to war and fight for his country, he should be entitled to vote. The Veterans' Schools were at St. Jude and Booker T. Washington High Schools. People from all walks of life attended "citizenship schools" in the homes of people who had been trained by Lewis in "voting clinics." Lewis was an incredible and detailed organizer. Precision, efficiency and thoroughness were his calling cards. Indeed, he kept voting registration organizing forms in the trunk of his car, and at every opportunity he would attempt to get people to join up for citizenship school. He organized neighborhoods block by

block, each with a "block captain."

Already a business associate in his wife's family business, Ross and Clayton Funeral Home, Lewis opened the "Citizens' Club" in 1952, a social nightclub where members were registered voters or enrolled in "citizenship schools."

Lewis was a member of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, now designated as the Historic King Memorial Baptist Church. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., age 26, was the pastor during the early and mid 1950s. Lewis was also a member of Southern Pride Elks Lodge #431, A. A. Peters Masonic Lodge #900 and the National Urban League.

Lewis' expert organizing skills and his insight to human leadership potential prompted him to nominate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to be the spokesman for the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), the organization that spearheaded the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-57). Lewis became Chair of the Transportation Committee that operated with military precision (JoAnn Robinson's The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It) and the Chair of the Voter Registration Committee. He served on the Board and the Executive Committee of the MIA.

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Lewis, Rufus A. Papers, 1935-1997

Processed by: Dr. Gwendolyn M. Patton

Date completed: October 2001

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Source: Rufus Lewis Collection, TSTC Library & Archives. Dr. Gwen Patton, Archivist.

H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College Archives
Compiled by: Dr. Gwen Patton, TSTC Archivist

Biography

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Biographical Data

Rufus Andrews Lewis. Born 11/30/06 Montgomery

Completed High School and Jr. College at Ala State Laboratory High School and Ala State Teachers Jr. College ^{Montgomery, Ala.} Received A. B. Degree in Business Administration at Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. ¹⁹³¹

I taught one year at Conecuh County Training School, Evergreen, Ala and one year ^{at people} Village School, at Mt. Meigs, Ala. 1931-1933

In 1933 I was employed at Alabama State Teachers College as ^{assistant} Football and Track Coach. In 1934 I was promoted to Head Coach for football and track. This employment lasted about nine years;

Following which I was call to serve in world war II but due to an injury received in a automobile accident ^{while} taking a track team to prairieview college in prairieview Texas; I was placed in 4 F. Classification and ^{was} urged to go into ^{national} Defense work. I work in Defense work about 7 years,

In the early In the yr. 1954 I was a part of a nucleus who was motivated by the unfair and undemocratic treatment that Black Citizens were subjected to when riding public Buses. When Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to get up from her seat and give it to a white man; I was a part of the nucleus who organized the Montgomery Bus protest. I nominated Rev. Martin Luther King as Chairman of that Movement, known then as the Montgomery Improvement Association, supported his successful election. In that recently organized Association I served as a board member. I was elected to be a member of the Board, the Chairman of the transportation Committee and also Chairman of Voter Registration Committee.

Presently I am a member of the Alabama Legislature representing the 77 District in Montgomery, a member of the State Democratic Executive Committee, Secretary treasurer of the Montgomery County Democratic Executive Comm., Member of Board of Montgomery Community Action Agency.

Secretary Treasurer of Kass-Clayton Funeral Home. Inc. ^{operating for more than 5}
a former Chairman of The Alabama Democratic
Conference, a former member of the Park & Recreation
Board of the City of Montgomery.

^{For more than 25 yrs}

I reside at 801 Bolivar St. Montgomery, Alabama.
I was married to the late Jule Clayton Lewis who
was a graduate of Spellman University in Atlanta Ga.,
and received an M.A. ^{degree} in Education from the University
of Wisconsin, to where she was headed when she
met with a fatal automobile accident. I have one
daughter and three grand children who live in Colorado
Springs, Colo.