

## H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College



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### Unveiling of Historic Marker in Honor of Rufus A. Lewis

September 20, 2001

Remarks by Dr. Gwen Patton, TSTC Archivist

The Hon. Rufus Andrew Lewis, “a devoted husband, father and statesman” as inscribed on his final resting place by his daughter, Eleanor, was born on November 30, 1906, in Montgomery County. He 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 1940s, 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 H. Councill 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 HON. RUFUS A. LEWIS is the father of Montgomery and Central Alabama’s Voting Rights Movement.

Lewis was a 1929, graduate of Fisk University. He married Jule Adelaide Clayton, and to this union was born 1 daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. Mrs. Jule Clayton Lewis preceased her husband in 1958. Lewis joined the Alabama State Teachers College (now ASU) in 1936, and served as assistant librarian and athletic coach. Soon afterwards, Lewis was respectfully and affectionately known as “Coach Lewis” for his successful strategies as football, track and football coach.

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Remarks by Patton on the Rufus A. Lewis Historic Marker

Unveiling

9/20/01

Lewis in 1952, opened the "Citizens' Club," a night club for African-Americans. In order to be a member of the Club, you had to be a registered voter. Many members, after attending Lewis' Voting Clinics, held citizenship schools in their homes. Others served as block captains and community organizers to help other Black citizens to become registered voters. Lewis was a consummate "organization-man" who left no detail unattended.

In 1960, Lewis was one of the founders and the first Montgomery County Chapter Presidents of the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC).

In 1976, Lewis resigned as an elected Alabama State Representative to accept the appointment by U. S. President Jimmy Carter to serve as an United States Marshal. Lewis was the first African-American to be appointed to this district in the Middle District of Alabama.

We at H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College invite you to visit our archives to review, peruse and to research the profound Rufus A. Lewis Collection of over 20,000 documents and small artifacts.

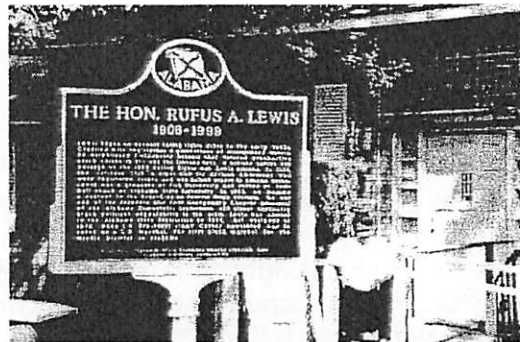
-- Thank you--

# Rufus A. Lewis

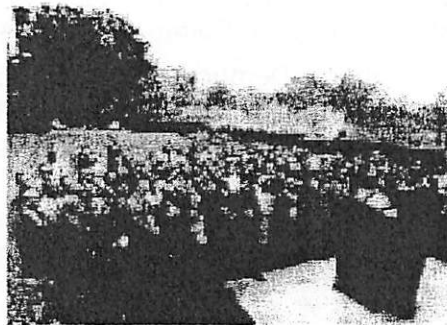


1. Mr. Rufus A. Lewis attended Alabama State Laboratory High School and Alabama State Teachers' Junior College. He was a graduate of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, where he earned an A. B. Degree in Business Administration in 1931.
2. Lewis launched an earnest and consistent voting rights drive. He worked with students at Alabama State Laboratory High School's "Citizenship Club" in 1938 and thereafter.
3. 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."
4. 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).
5. 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.
6. He co-founded (1960) of 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.
7. He was co-founded of 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.
8. 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.

9. 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.
10. A public library in Montgomery was named in his honor in 1994.
11. Lewis in 1974 was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives, District 77. United States President Jimmy Carter appointed Lewis in 1977 to become the first Black U.S. Marshal of the Middle District of Alabama. Lewis' tenure in this position ended in 1981.
12. The Honorable Rufus A. Lewis passed on August 19, 1999. He was 92 years old.
13. The Honorable Rufus A. Lewis passed on August 19, 1999. He was 92 years old.
14. The Lewis Collection of more than 40,000 papers, manuscripts and small artifacts is housed in the archives at the H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College in Montgomery, Alabama.



Historic Marker Outside the Lewis Family Home.



Rufus A. Lewis, Father of Montgomery and Central Alabama's Voting Rights Movement, in White House Rose Garden as President Lyndon Baines Johnson announces his intent to usher in a Voting Rights Bill, April 1965.

**You are cordially  
invited to the  
Unveiling of Historic  
Marker in Honor of  
Rufus A. Lewis**

**Father of Montgomery and Central Alabama's  
Voting Rights Movement**

**Thursday, September 20, 2001**

**11:00 A. M.**

**801 Bolivar Street (near High Street off of  
Jackson Street)**

**Sponsors: H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College Archives  
Montgomery Friends of the Historic Voting Rights Trail**

## 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 Stat 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 other become registered voters. Many member 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.

# The Montgomery-Tuskegee Times 1/25-31/01

## Trenholm Technical College Archives' 2001 Program

Trenholm Archives is sending out an ABP to all BUS BOYCOTT DRIVERS, CITIZENS' CLUB MEMBERS, CITIZENSHIP SCHOOL TEACHERS and organizers TO CALL 240-9739 ASAP. Please leave your name, address and phone number on the vice mail.

You will be honored as special guests at the unveiling of the Hon. Rufus A. Lewis Historic Marker at his Home House, where his granddaughter, Ms. Karen Dawkins, now resides. Also, during this auspicious occasion, you will witness the changing of Bolivar Street to the Hon. Rufus A. Lewis Lane.

Please call 240-9739 and give the archives your information. The archives does not want to look over anyone who played and continues to play a crucial role in "Our Stride Towards Freedom," As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently expressed in his 1958 book that chronicled our successful Montgomery bus Boycott.

### *id 1/25-31/01* Ceremony to honor civil rights leader

Trenholm State Technical College Archivist Gwendolyn M. Patton requests that all Montgomery Bus Boycott participants and organizers call her office concerning a proposed ceremony honoring civil rights leader Rufus A. Lewis.

The celebration will be held at his former home. Attendees will be witnesses to the name changing of Bolivar Street to Rufus A. Lewis Lane. Patton asks all people who participated in the boycott to call 240-9739 and leave their address and phone number.

Trenholm Archives does not want to overlook anyone who played a role in "Our Stride Towards Freedom," she said.

Trenholm Archives is looking for all Montgomery Bus Boycott bus drivers, Citizens' Club members, Citizenship school teachers and others who significantly contributed. These people will be honored during the upcoming unveiling of the Honorable Rufus A. Lewis historical marker. 240-9739.

**The Hon. Rufus A. Lewis  
1906 - 1999**

Lewis began an earnest voting rights drive in the early 1940s. Credited with registering 4 generations of Montgomery voters, he established Citizenship Schools that tutored prospective black voters to fill out the literacy text, a barrier before the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Lewis opened, in 1952, the "Citizens' Club," a night club for African Americans who were registered voters and who helped others to become voters. Lewis was a graduate of Fisk University and served as football coach at Alabama State University. In 1958, he became a partner in the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home business. He was one of the founders and first Montgomery Chapter president of the Alabama Democratic Conference, the oldest continuing black political organization in the state. Lewis was elected to the Alabama state legislature in 1974, but resigned in 1976, when U.S. President Jimmy Carter appointed him to serve as a U.S. Marshal, the first black marshal for the Middle District in Alabama.

**ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

**2001**

**THE INSCRIPTION FOR THE HISTORIC MARKER**



**FRIDAY**  
 Sept. 21, 2001  
 Montgomery  
 Edition  
 50 cents

# Alabama

## MARKING HISTORY



Karen S. Doerr Staff

Eleanor Lewis Dawkins, daughter of Rufus A. Lewis, unveils a new historical marker in his honor Thursday at 801 Bolivar St., which has been renamed Rufus A. Lewis Place.

## Monument honors activist

By Jannell McGrew  
 Montgomery Advertiser

Everybody called him "Coach," and he was known the state over for ensuring blacks registered to vote at a time when they were denied the right.

Rufus A. "Coach" Lewis received a recognition Thursday that many who honored the late civil rights pioneer believe was long overdue. About 50 people applauded as his daughter, Eleanor Lewis Dawkins, unveiled a marker in honor of her father.

Gwendolyn Patton, archivist at H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College, and others have led the effort in getting the marker, which stands in front of Lewis' home. The college's archives holds a collection of more than 20,000 documents provided by Lewis. He died in 1999.

"He saved everything because he knew we were going to continue his dream and his work," Patton said. She called Lewis "the father of Montgomery's and central Alabama's voting rights movement."

Dawkins said although her father did not brag about his work and is not

as well-known as other civil rights icons, "he worked very, very hard to make sure that we had rights."

"Having this historic monument erected ... is truly, truly an honor," she said.



Lewis

Lewis began his voting rights drive in the early 1940s and is credited with registering more than four generations of voters, Patton said. He later established "citizenship schools," which tutored potential black voters. Students learned how to fill out literacy tests, which were often designed to keep blacks from voting.

Various community and political leaders attended the outdoor ceremony.

Rep. Thad McClammy, D-Montgomery, said one of the first role models he sought as a young man was Lewis.

"He was a person who didn't do a lot of bragging and boasting about what he did," McClammy said. "But he was a person who was

### RUFUS A. LEWIS

Civil rights pioneer Rufus A. Lewis (1906-1999) was born in Montgomery County. Lewis was a graduate of Fisk University and served as football coach at Alabama State University. Lewis was a partner with the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home. He was one of the founders and the first Montgomery County Chapter president for the Alabama Democratic Conference, the oldest black political organization in the state. He was elected to the Alabama Legislature in 1974 but resigned in 1976 when President Carter appointed him to serve as a U.S. marshal.

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Jerome Gray, state field coordinator for the Alabama Democratic Conference, said he owes his success and career to Lewis.

"You can't go anywhere in this state ... where old-timers don't know and respect Mr. Lewis and his work," he said.

The street just outside

Lewis' home has also been named after Lewis. The house contains many original items, including Lewis' old office space. Lewis also served as football coach at Alabama State University.

Larry Armstead, administrative assistant to Mayor Bobby Bright, paid tribute to Lewis on a personal note.

"I am here as a proud black man thanking Mr. Lewis for what he has contributed," he said. "He was a positive thinking individual who saw darkness and tried to shed light."

Sen. Charles Langford, D-Montgomery, said he will never forget the coach's ability to get blacks in the military registered. Lewis would know before anyone else when black troops were coming home, he said.

"He contacted everybody who had returned to get them to register to vote," said Langford. "He has had a great influence on my life."

Jannell McGrew, who covers religion and race relations for the Montgomery Advertiser, can be reached at 240-0121 or by fax at 261-1521 or by e-mail at [jmcgrew@montgomeryadvertiser.com](mailto:jmcgrew@montgomeryadvertiser.com).

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Mark Miller Staff

Karen Dawkins, left, holds the hand of her grandfather, Rufus Lewis, in front of Lewis' home on Dericote Street; Ed Davis, who also lives on Dericote, stands with Gwendolyn Patton. Patton is a member of Montgomery's Historic Development Commission, which will place historic markers on the street.

# Street home to civil rights history

**Recognized:** Dericote Street has earned a historic designation for its place in history

By Ron Ellis  
Montgomery Advertiser

A stroll down Dericote Street is a stroll down memory lane of the civil rights movement's grass roots.

So much so, in fact, that Montgomery's Historic Development Commission has decided to give the entire street a historic designation. Markers will soon be placed at each end of Dericote, which runs from South Jackson Street to Grove Street.

"It is an interesting street.

There are so many wonderful stories that emanate from the many major personages who settled there," said Historic Commission member and historian Mary Ann Neeley.

At the north end of Dericote is the home of Rufus A. Lewis, called by some the father of Montgomery's Voting Rights Movement. Lewis was also the first black Alabamian to be appointed a U.S. marshal.

On the east side of the street, near Grove, is the family home of the late Georgia Gilmore, mother of City Councilman Mark Gilmore. She was president of the Club From Nowhere, which raised funds to support those taking part in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

"Mrs. Gilmore was an ex-

cellent cook. Many dignitaries ate at her table during those turbulent days, including people like Martin Luther King Jr., and U.S. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy," said Historic Commission member Gwendolyn Patton.

Patton's family also had a home on Dericote Street. Sam Patton was a contractor who built the civil rights watering hole known as the Ben Moore Hotel, which was one of the few places visiting black activists could stay in segregated Montgomery.

Sam Patton also supervised the construction of the new Hutchinson Street Baptist Church. An historic shingle will be placed directly in front of the church.

History Page 2A

## HISTORIC DESIGNATION

Montgomery Historic Development Commission will recognize Dericote Street because of residents who played important roles in the civil rights movement.



Kevin Van Hyning Staff

# History: Dericote saw pioneers

From Page 1A

After surviving a KKK bombing in 1957, it was finally forced to move from Hutchinson Street to Grove Street in the mid 1960s because of the building of Interstate 85.

"The construction of the interstate is the reason so many of these civil rights pioneers ended up here on Dericote. The highway split the neighborhood and brought about a lot of demolition. It's almost as if an act of God led so many of them to this street," said Patton.

Sixty-six-year-old Ed Davis and his parents also moved to Dericote Street. He was in his early 20s

when his parents, James and Pauline Bryant, became involved in the movement, and enlisted his help.

"They were both musicians, and they played gospel music at all of the mass meetings we had during the bus boycott. Everybody was doing something to help. So, I had to drive the church van and give people rides back and forth to work," said Davis, who is pleased to see his parents and the others recognized for the things they did.

"It was a nervous sort of time. Really, just out right dangerous. We took a lot of chances. But it paid off, I think. From the moment we stepped out there, it paid off," Davis said.

Amelia Scott-Green, Julia Tripp, Willie Ann Stinson, and W.J. Adair all gathered in front of the Hutchinson Street Church on Monday to talk about the historic designation, and reminisce about the struggle.

"The people on Dericote Street and in this church did more for our freedom than anyone will ever know. It's good to see this happening," said Tripp, who was a waitress at the Regal Cafe, located around the corner on Jackson Street. It was the city's first integrated eatery, and was a meeting place for black and white civil rights activists.