



Special to the Advertiser

Eleanor Dawkins, right, the daughter of Rufus Lewis, and her daughter, Karen, listen to the reading of Lewis' letters.

Voting rights activist's letters tell story of hope, desire for equality

Rufus A. Lewis, who was known as the father of Montgomery's voting rights movement, corresponded with many other players in the movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Filled with encouragement and strategy for achieving the right to vote, his correspondence told a story of hope and his desire for blacks to be equal citizens in the community.

Among his papers are letters from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, W.C. Patton, and attorneys Arthur Shores and Ozell Billingsley.

This week, some of his correspondence was read to a whole new generation of blacks who now have voting rights as a result of Lewis' involvement, commitment and

knack for organizing. The program took place in the Library Tower of Learning at Trenchholm State Technical College, which is located on the Historic Voting Rights Trail.

Among those gathered to hear the correspondence read by Adana Bennett, Lonnie Greene, Stinson Holmes and Gwen Patton, who are students and members of the faculty at the college, was Eleanor Dawkins, the daughter of Rufus Lewis. With her was her daughter, Karen Dawkins.

Some others attending were among the people who worked with Lewis in the 1950s, including Joe Dickerson, Idessa Redden, James Hall, Carrie Peavy, Andre Bolling, Pearl Gray Daniels and Johnnie Carr.



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Lonnie Greene reads some of Lewis' letters in front of a portrait of the activist.

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Montgomery



Tuesday
Feb. 23, 1999

Trenholm State to honor Rufus A. Lewis

Trenholm State Technical College will honor Rufus A. Lewis at a special program at 10 a.m. Thursday in the school's Library Tower of Learning. The program is part of the school's month-long celebration and recognition of Black History Month.

"(Lewis) did a voting rights drive among African Americans in the city and the coun-

ty and adjacent counties," said Gwen Patton, archivist at Trenholm State Technical College. "He kept meticulous files on that work."

Some of the letters and papers that are housed in the school's archives will be read by faculty, staff and students. Letters from Ozell Billingsley and W.C. Patton will be read as well as letters from Lewis

to notable Montgomerians.

The college's archives is the repository for 13 others whose work in the voting rights struggle for African Americans made a significant impact on the history of Montgomery.

For more information about Thursday's program contact the college at 832-9000.

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.

(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