

H. Councill Trenholm State Technical  
College Gratefully Acknowledges



Past and Present Voting Rights Activists

Friends of Trenholm State Technical  
College Archives

Montgomery Friends of the Historic  
Voting Rights Trail

Alabama Department of History and  
Archives

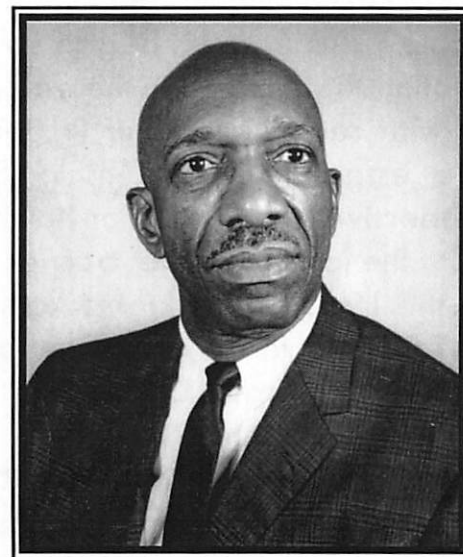
Alabama Historic Association

Ross-Clayton Funeral Home

Hutchinson Missionary Baptist Church

*Printed by: Shirley Billups-Smith*

*UNVEILING OF HISTORIC  
MARKER IN HONOR OF*



TSTC Archives

**RUFUS A. LEWIS**

**FATHER OF MONTGOMERY AND CENTRAL ALABAMA'S  
VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2001  
11:00 A.M.**

**801 BOLIVER STREET  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36104**

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

The Honorable Rufus A. Lewis began an earnest and consistent Voting Rights Drive in the early 1940s. He is credited with registering over 4 generations of voters. He established Citizenship Schools that tutored prospective Black voters on how to fill out the literacy test, the pre-requisite barrier before the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Lewis was a graduate of Fisk University and served as football coach at Alabama State University. He was a widower (Mrs. Jule Clayton Lewis-d. 1958) with 1 daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. Lewis was an associate in the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home business and opened the "Citizens' Club," a social club for African-Americans who were registered voters and who helped others to become registered voters. Lewis was one of the founders and the first Montgomery County Chapter President for the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC), the oldest Black political organization in the state. Lewis was elected to the Alabama State Legislature, but resigned in 1976, when United States President Jimmy Carter appointed him to serve as an U.S. Marshal, the first Black to serve in the Middle District.

## PROGRAMME

INVOCATION . . . . . REV. RON GILES, STAFF  
H. COUNCILL TRENHOLM STATE TECH COLLEGE

OCCASION . . . . . DR. GWEN PATTON, ARCHIVIST  
H. COUNCILL TRENHOLM STATE TECH COLLEGE

MS. K. T. BROWN, BOARD MEMBER  
MONTGOMERY FRIENDS OF THE  
HISTORIC VOTING RIGHTS TRAIL

REMARKS . . DR. FRED GAINOUS, CHANCELLOR  
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

TRIBUTES . . . . . LEWIS LEGATEES  
ELECTED OFFICIALS, VETERAN VOTING  
RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, COMMUNITY LEADERS

RESPONSES . . MRS. ELEANOR LEWIS DAWKINS,  
DAUGHTER

MS. KAREN DAWKINS,  
GRANDDAUGHTER

BENEDICTION REV. HENRY HENDRICKS, STAFF  
H. COUNCILL TRENHOLM STATE TECH COLLEGE

REPAST FOLLOWING CEREMONY  
CATERED BY  
H. COUNCILL TRENHOLM STATE TECHNICAL  
COLLEGE CULINARY ARTS CENTRE

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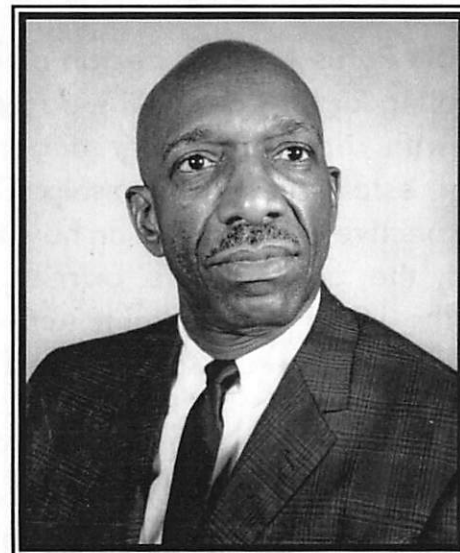
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**ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
HISTORICAL MARKER APPLICATION**

1. Suggested title: The Hon. Rufus A. Lewis (1906-1999)

2. Significance of landmark or event to be marked: See Narrative

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Historical information including important dates associated with the landmark or event:

See Narrative

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Sources of information: (give exact name of publications, authors, dates, volumes, and page numbers or enclose photocopy of original data):

Special Collections, Trenholm State Technical College Archives

U. S. NEWS REPORT, October 8, 1995

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Proposed marker narrative: 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 test, a barrier before the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Lewis was a graduate of Fisk University and served as football coach at Alabama State University. He was a widower (Mrs. Jule Clayton Lewis-d. 1958) with 1 daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Lewis Dawkins. Lewis opened (1952) the "Citizens' Club," a night club for African Americans who were registered voters and who helped others to become voters. In 1958, he became a partner in the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home business. Lewis was one of the founders and first Montgomery Chapter President for the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC), the oldest Black political organization in the state. Lewis was elected to the Alabama State Legislature, but resigned in 1976, when U.S. President Jimmy Carter appointed him to serve as an U. S. Marshal, the first Black marshal for the Middle District in Alabama.

6. Give exact location of proposed marker site including sketch map showing roads, streets, or other identifiable landmarks in the area.

A. Exact location: 801 Bolivar Street

B. Sketch map of proposed marker site:

In front yard of the Lewis Home

7. Approval of site owner:

It is the responsibility of the group requesting the marker to secure approval of the property owner, whether it is privately owned or on a city, county, state, or federal right-of-way. Site owner or designated official's signature must appear below.

8. Sponsoring organization: Trenholm State Technical College Archives

9. Billing. Marker must be paid for by the requesting group before being manufactured. Give name and address of person to be billed by manufacturer.

Name: Trenholm State Technical College Archives

Address: 1225 Air Base Blvd.

Mtg'y., AL 36108

10. Shipping Address. Markers are shipped by common carriers to a commercial (not residential) address:

Ship to attention of: Dr. Gwen Patton, Archivist

Address: Same as above

11. Signatures: We request that the Alabama Historical Commission approve a historical marker for the landmark or event herein described in this application:

Trenholm State Tech College Archives  
Sponsoring Organization

[Signature]  
Official of Sponsoring Organization

[Signature]  
Owner of Site or authorized officer

Date

11-22-2000

Date November 22, 2000



# 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. Council Trenchum 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.

respected throughout this community, throughout this state and throughout this nation."

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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