

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.

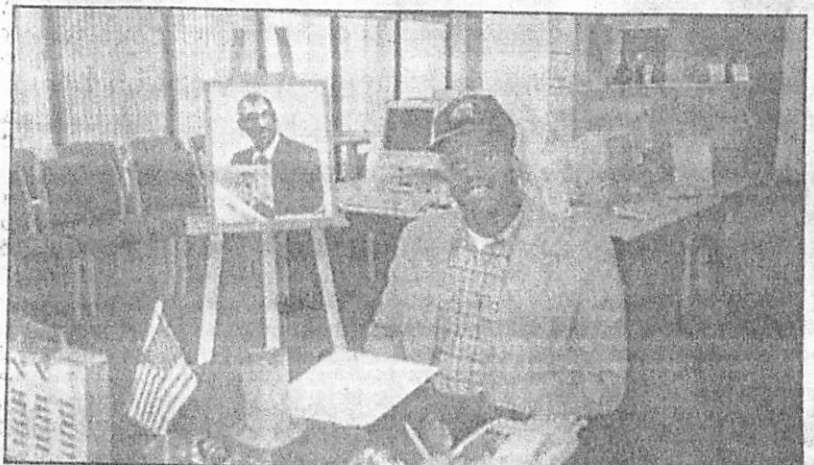
Among his papers are letters from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, W.C. Patton, and attorneys Arthur Shores and Ozell Billingsley.

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 Trenholm 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.

Lifestyle

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Sunday
 March 14, 1999
 Elizabeth Via Brown 3G
 Weddings 5-6G
 Coffee Break 7G



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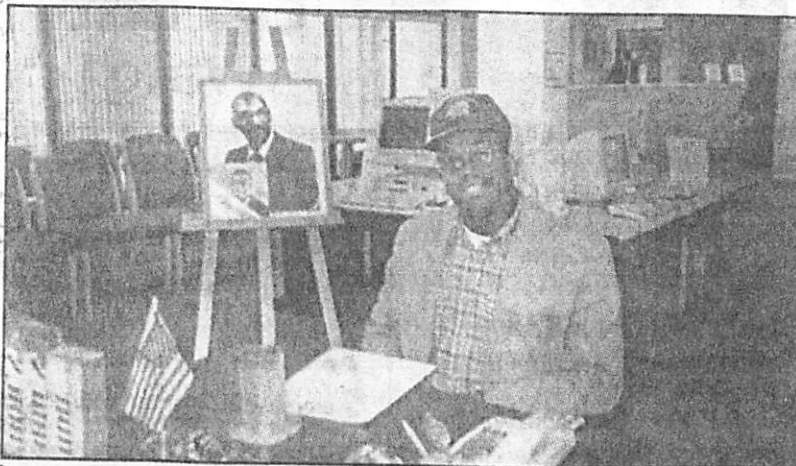
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Montgomery-Tuskegee Times

THE HISTORIC

KEEPING THE BLACK COMMUNITY INFORMED OF ISSUES AFFECTING ITS SURVIVAL

OCTOBER 18-24, 2001



First row, Ms. Lillian Bradford; second row, Historical Marker Honoring Rufus A. Lewis and third row, Street names honoring Rufus A. Lewis. Photos by Dr. Gwen Patton

Trenholm Tech Archives News Briefs

Mrs. Lillian Bradford, who has donated her original "poll tax receipts" to the Archives, stopped by to peruse the Rufus A. Lewis Collection.

On September 20, 2001, the Archives hosted an auspicious ceremony, "Unveiling the

soldiers who worked with Coach Lewis, and family attended the ceremony. Bolivar Street was changed to "Rufus A. Lewis Lane," thanks to the support of Lewis family's neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. John Patrick, and Councilman Tracy Larkin.

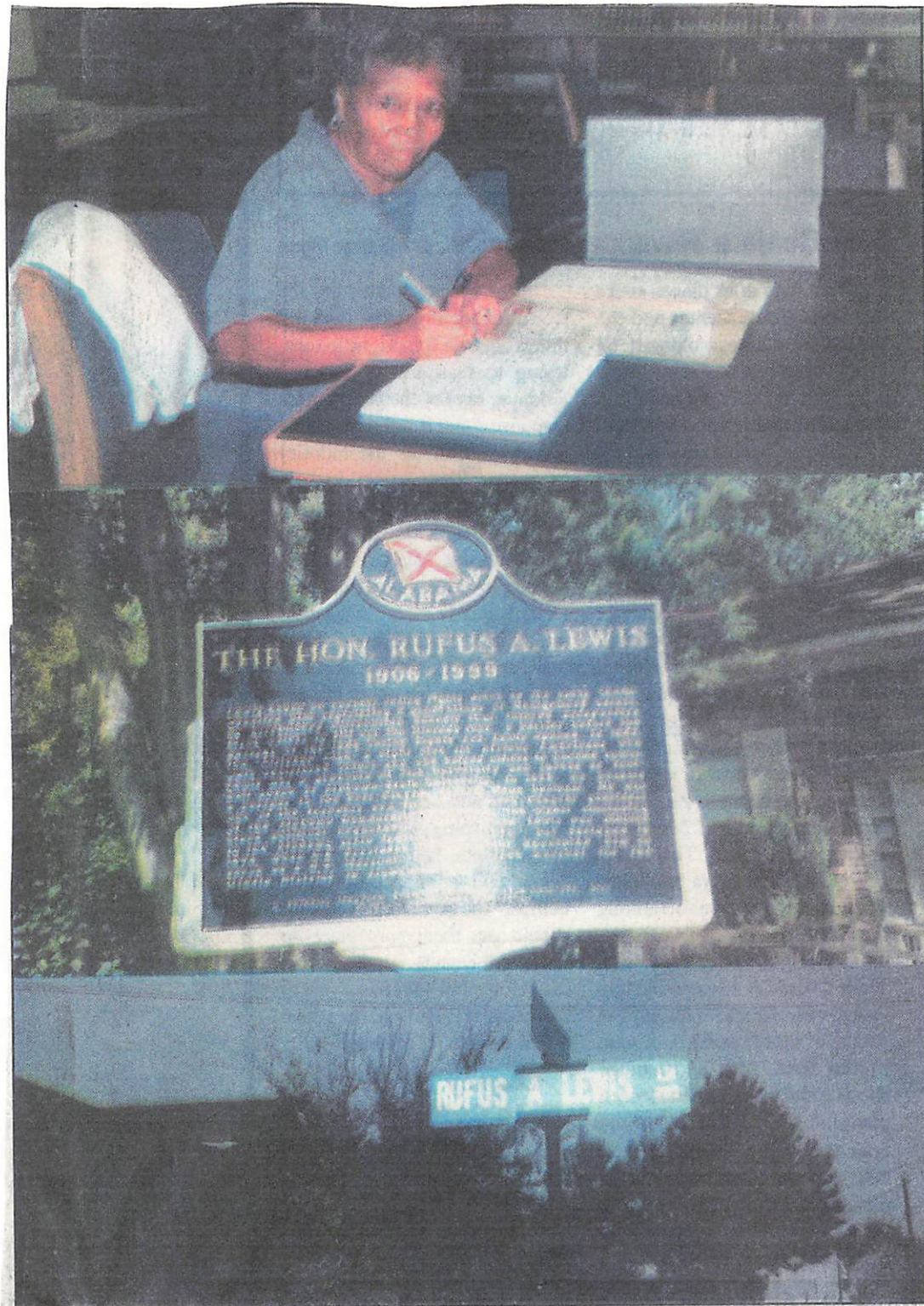
llor of Postsecondary Education, St. Sen. Charles Langford, St. Rep. Thad McClammy, State and County School Board Members Ella Bell and Herman Harris, City Councilman James Nuckles; Administrative Assistant to the Mayor Larry Armstead and ADC State Coordinator James Gray.

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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 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.

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.