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in honor of Idessa Redden

The Montgomery Community Action Agency recently named an Early Childhood Development Center in honor of longtime St. Jude parishioner Mrs. Idessa Redden.

Mrs. Redden, a veteran civil rights activist who worked with Dr.



Mrs. Idessa Redden.

Photo: Special to The Independent

Martin Luther King, Jr. and other local leaders, began her career as a family service worker with the Montgomery Community Action Agency in 1970. She retired at 85 in 1998.

The Center is located at the Church of God Pentecostal, 4544 South Court Street.

The 89 year old Mrs. Redden is a charter member of the St. Jude Ladies of Charity and is still active in parish activities.

The Idessa Redden Collection has been established in the Archives of the H. Council Trenholm State Technical

College in Montgomery and is open to the public.

The dedicatory ceremonies, with W.W. Steele presiding, included prayer by Rev. Wesley Lewis, a tribute by Mrs. Linda Hampton, and a proclamation by Mrs. Paulette Moncrief. A reception followed in the Center.

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CHURCH MARKS 47 YEARS SINCE HISTORIC MEETING



Photos by Tamika Moore Advertiser

People sing hymns Monday at Holt Street Baptist Church, the site of a mass meeting of the Montgomery bus boycott 47 years ago. Zecoy Williams, second from left, Idessa Redden, center, and Alma Johnson, niece of E.D. Nixon Sr., attended the 1955 meeting.

Ceremony celebrates boycott



Civil rights attorney Fred Gray Sr. speaks Monday during the observance of the Montgomery bus boycott anniversary at Holt Street Baptist Church.

By Jannell McGrew
Montgomery Advertiser

As civil rights attorney Fred Gray Sr. peered across the crowd of about 500 people sitting inside Holt Street Baptist Church late Monday night, a powerful thought struck him.

"I relived two important days," he said as he spoke to the crowd. "One was Dec. 1, 1955, when Mrs. (Rosa) Parks was arrested and Dec. 5, 1955, when we assembled in this building."

It was Monday night exactly 47 years ago that Gray sat in the far left corner of the historic church and watched a sea of people — at least 5,000 — stream into the church and spill over into the streets. It was the night of the first mass meeting of the Montgomery bus boycott and the day that 40,000 blacks refused to ride

Montgomery's then-segregated buses.

Some of those boycotters along with other Montgomery residents, young and old, gathered at the church to remember the unprecedented meeting nearly half a century ago.

During the days of the boycott, the church not only served as a hub of information surrounding the boycott's progress, but a reservoir of inspiration and hope for blacks, said Dorothy Autrey, associate history professor at ASU.

"They knew they were up against a mighty struggle," she said. "They knew the only way they could make it through was by the grace of God."

About a dozen people, who actually attended the first meeting — including longtime activist Johnnie

Carr, Idessa Redden and Zecoy Williams — came to Monday's event.

Redden recalled that night in 1955 vividly. At the time, she didn't know who the Rev. Martin Luther King was. She and a relative had left home about 6:30 p.m. that night, thinking it would be easy to get a seat. But to their surprise, Redden recalled, they had to sit in the balcony.

Redden said the night was one she will never forget. King preached with a fervor she had never witnessed by any preacher before.

"When I heard that man speaking, I just knew I could follow him," she said. "I never got emotional in a church nowhere, but that night, I screamed to the top of my voice."

Redden shares King's advice

By Sean Selman
ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

Throughout the month of February, the *Montgomery Advertiser* profiled people who participated or contributed to the Montgomery bus boycott.

Not all of what was said would fit into the short profiles.

Idessa Williams Redden, who registered voters on behalf of the Montgomery Improvement Association, had much to say about the movement and its leader.

The following are excerpts from a recent conversation with her about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who served as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association and leader of the boycott:

■ "He was a man among men."

On Monday, Dec. 5, 1955, she and her cousin went to the mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church.

"When we got there, we just did

get a seat in the balcony. That was the first I heard of Dr. Martin Luther King."

She asked her cousin who that young man was, and she was told he was the new preacher at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.



Redden

knew black Montgomery had found the leader they needed.

"I raised my hands, and I said, 'Lord, you have sent us a leader!' — I never had screamed out in church before.

"I knew the good Lord had sent us this man, and I could follow him."

■ Mrs. Redden said she also learned from the Rev. Dr. King:

One time she got impatient with a media circus that had gathered in the aisles of the Rev. Dr. King's church just before a mass meeting.

She was trying to get to her pew, and she stepped all over the white cameramen and reporters kneeling in the aisles.

The next day, she was summoned to the Rev. Dr. King's office.

"He said, 'Have a seat.' Then he said, 'Mrs. Williams, we got to love our white brothers.'

"I said, 'I don't understand.' And he said, 'Mrs. Williams, we got to love our white brothers.' I said, 'What have I done?' He said, 'Mrs. Williams, we got to love our white brothers.'

"He must have said it five times and it sank in. Then it came to me how rude I was that Monday night. I said, 'Dr. King, I can't promise I will love them better. But I will try.'"

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Montgomerian registered black voters



MARK MILLER/STAFF

Idessa Williams Redden, now 83, made it her mission to register black voters in Montgomery for 18 years.

Idessa Williams Redden 1912 -

During the Montgomery bus boycott, Idessa Williams Redden worked long and hard for the Montgomery Improvement Association, registering blacks to vote. And she relishes her memories of the struggle.

"Oh, some glorious days," she said. "I enjoyed it, and I learned a lot, too. I had a chance to meet so many people."

When Rufus King stepped down as chairman of the group's voter registration arm in 1962, Mrs. Redden assumed the job.

A Montgomery native, Mrs. Redden moved away from the city for a time but returned with her husband in 1955, just one month before Rosa Parks' arrest.

She first heard of the boycott from her cousin the night before it began.

"I didn't believe we, as black people, were just going to stay off the city line," Mrs. Redden said.

But she was surprised Dec. 5, 1955, as she watched buses running

through her neighborhood without a single black face staring out the windows.

"I said to myself, 'Maybe these people do mean business.'"

By 1956, Mrs. Redden had begun registering voters for Mr. Lewis. She was the captain of Precinct 2 North, bordered by Early, Bell and Goode streets and Air Base Boulevard. At the time there were only 400 registered black voters in the precinct.

"I had a team of ladies working with me. We'd go out in the afternoon," Mrs. Redden said. She and the others would ask residents if they were registered to vote, then offer to register them if they were not.

"Some told us no, some told us lies, but we kept at them," Mrs. Redden said. "When I stopped, or rather, when I slowed down, we had about 3,000 registered up there."

She remained chairwoman of the Montgomery Improvement Association's voter registration efforts until 1974.

— Sean Selman/Staff

COMING THURSDAY: *Alabama Senate Judiciary Committee*



Kevin Glackmeyer Advertiser

Gwen Patton, left, hugs Idessa Taylor Williams-Redden at her 90th birthday party.

Community turns out for birthday celebration

Idessa Taylor Williams-Redden won't turn 90 until Wednesday, but family and friends turned out last week to honor her at a morning reception in the Joseph L. Dickerson

Culinary Arts Centre at the H. Council Trenholm State Technical College Archives.

Instrumental in both the voting and civil rights movements, she registered as a voter in Alabama in 1949. She said she has spent the last 50 years helping to "uplift my fellow man."

For nearly 30 years she was a family service worker with the Montgomery Community Action Agency. She still devotes many hours to the St. Jude Ladies of Charity.

"I don't do things for honor," she said, "I just do things."

But it was an honor for so many friends to attend the party for her, for which students of the Culinary Arts program, under the direction of **Mary Ann Campbell**, prepared the refreshments. There to lead the singing of "Happy Birthday" was another of Montgomery's

distinguished seniors, **Bobby Jackson**.

Many of her fellow church members of St. Jude's Catholic Church were there, as were former co-workers and Trenholm Tech staff and faculty, including the president, **Anthony Molina**; participants of the Montgomery Friends of the Historic Voting Rights Trail; **Quinton Ross**, who was recently elected Senator of state District 26; **Ella Bell**; **Larry Barrow**; **Dr. Richard Bailey**; **Willy Leventhal**; Trenholm archivist **Gwen Patton**; and the Rev. **Tom Gardner**.

Coming from Woodbridge, Va., for the event was the honoree's son, **John Redden**.

College prepares to honor Redden

By Jannell McGrew
Montgomery Advertiser

A Montgomery woman described as one of the pioneers of the voting rights and civil rights movements in Alabama will be honored for her works today, eight days before her 90th birthday.

Idessa Williams Redden will be recognized by H. Council Trenholm State Technical College during a special birthday celebration at 11:30 a.m. at the college's Culinary Arts Centre on Mobile Highway.



Redden

Redden "is a pillar in our community," said Gwendolyn Patton, head archivist at Trenholm.

"She has, since her teenage days, vowed to fight for first-class citizenship for African-Americans and she has been consistent ever since."

Patton said Redden was known for her courage and straightforwardness as she defied pressure from segregationists and sought to convince blacks to register to vote.

Redden said she felt honored by the college's gesture.

"I really think it's a good idea, and I appreciate it very much," she said.

In characteristic fashion, she added with a chuckle, "I hate to say it, but I think I deserved it because of my hard work in the community."

Born Nov. 27, 1912, she became a registered voter in 1949, when most blacks weren't registered to vote. As a block captain, she worked with voting rights icon "Coach" Rufus Lewis in the crusade for full voting rights for blacks. Her job was to encourage blacks to sign up for voting rights clinics.

"She would visit people at night on dark roads while vigilantes and Klansmen were laying in wait," Patton said. "She's had several scary encounters as she went about organizing black people to fight for their voting rights."

Redden also worked with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and served as an organizer with Lewis on the Montgomery Improvement Association's Voter Registration Committee.

Redden has a collection of papers and various other materials at Trenholm State Technical College Archives.

Jannell McGrew, who covers race relations and religion