

# ....The Story of NAACP in

BLACK HAWK COUNTY  
1922 through 1980

Compiled during the Presidency of Ruth B. Anderson with the assistance of Ruth Holt, Ada Tredwell, Hellen Burke, Venella Byrd, and Delores Lee.

Fifty-seven years ago in February, the Waterloo Branch of NAACP was founded - 12 years after the national group organized. Since then, the local branch - now the Black Hawk County Branch of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE - has been alternately active and inactive.

During its existence, the branch has been headed by a variety of people, including a rabbi, several ministers, secretaries, physicians and numerous others. Four presidents have been white.

Among those issues which have been in the forefront of the branch's activities are education, housing, street improvements, integration of restaurants, fair employment practices and police relations. Some of the issues have been challenged again and again by the branch members.

Little is known about the early years of the local branch. It is known that REVEREND ROBERT A. BROYLES was first president after the group was founded by J.A. Mills and Gussie Mardis. Miss Mardis served as secretary and Robert Garland as treasurer. An early member of the branch recalls that Garland brought the branch's entire treasury to each meeting in a little black bag.

Reverend Broyles was a candidate for the Waterloo School Board backed by the branch and is believed to be the first black to seek the office. After Reverend Broyles was president, there is no written history of the branch until the mid-1930s. However, some older members recall that Dr. L.B. Furgerson and Milton Fields were presidents in the early 1930s.

It is known that DR. FURGERSON, Waterloo civic leader and physician for 21 years until his death in 1948, served as president of the branch in 1935-36. Dr. Furgerson was active in the branch after his terms and remained a board member for many years. In 1941, he was supported by the local branch in his unsuccessful candidacy for a seat on the Waterloo Board of Education. He attended many state and several national conferences on branches of NAACP. He is a member of the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce's Hall of Fame.

RABBI HAROLD H. GORDON succeeded Dr. Furgerson as president in 1937 and 1938. Rabbi Gordon served the Sons of Jacob Synagogue for seven years, and was its first ordained and English-speaking rabbi. He was active in many interfaith groups and was honored by many organizations. For the 30 years before his death in 1977, Gordon was executive vice president of the New York Board of Rabbis.

In 1939, MRS. LYDA B. PAGE became president of the branch and served four terms through 1942. During her term the NAACP passed a resolution November 21, 1941, stating its appreciation for services rendered by the later Judge W. Wood who had served on the board for 15 years. In 1942, the branch filed a complaint with the county attorney that "Negroes were being refused service" in certain (unnamed) restaurants and that some had "signs saying 'colored patronage is not desired.'" The third state conference of branches was in Waterloo that year and a youth council formed. Mrs. Page, a long-time member of the branch, remained active after her terms as president. She also served on the board of the state conference of branches in the 1940s.

MILTON F. FIELDS, Waterloo attorney, became president, possibly for the second time, in 1943 and served through 1946. He was also president for two years of the state conference during that time. Some of the issues which were reported during that time included striving for better provision for policing the "north end," housing and employment. In January 1944, the group studied "Negro housing" and post-war problems in the vicinity of the "north end" and later met with Waterloo Mayor Ralph Slippy to discuss crowded housing conditions, installation of water mains and high rents charged to blacks. In May 1945, the fight against housing conditions was continuing and the branch charged Waterloo city officials and organized real estate brokers with causing a ghetto to develop in the north end. The branch cited inadequate water supply and poor sidewalks and street repairs. The city council said the area was included in the city's proposed sewer extension after the war.

REVEREND GILBERT COX became the second white president of the local branch in 1947. Reverend Cox was pastor of First Methodist Church from 1943 to 1950. One highlight of 1947 was the celebration of Emancipation Day when Roy Wilkens, national NAACP assistant executive secretary who later became executive director, appeared in Waterloo. Wilkens told the group, "A nation cannot be free until all of its people are wholly free...Racial equality is the most urgent problem facing men today. A young country like ours cannot long tolerate slavery of body and mind..." The branch also received the Ike Smalls award in 1947 for the best report of a local branch of its activities during the past year. The Ike Smalls trophy was given to the Waterloo branch several times, including 1949.

MRS. VAELETTA FIELDS of 816 Sumner Street was president of the branch in 1948 and 1949. During the 1940s, the local branch sponsored a Boy Scout troop and became more active in promoting better race relations. The branch, during Mrs. Fields' terms, continued to work toward having more open service to blacks in restaurants. Just before and following World War II the branch worked extensively to get blacks registered as voters.

MRS. RUTH HOLT served as President from 1950 to 1953. During her term, the chapter hosted the State Conference of Branches. It continued the long struggle to get adequate public accommodations and services. Her presidency was marked by the strong advocacy for youth. Ada Tredwell headed the first NAACP Youth Council. The first sit-in was staged at Woolworths and the Youth Council members spearheaded this effort.

REVEREND GEORGE T. STINSON, then pastor of Payne A.M.E. Church, was president in 1953 and 1954. His presidency marked a low point in the branch's history and the national charter was nearly revoked. During 1952 and 1953, the branch was not very active. In 1954, the main topic of discussion was again fair employment. Reverend Stinson led a membership drive in 1953 to revitalize the branch and regular meetings were scheduled.

HELLEN BURKE, in 1955, became the first and only white woman to hold NAACP local presidency. Mrs. Burke, executive secretary at Warren Transport, recalls that she continued to work with other members to rebuild the branch after practically losing the charter. She remembers one main goal of the branch at that time was to eliminate referrals to race in news stories. Mrs. Burke later served as secretary and first vice president of the State Conference and was on a national NAACP committee.

DR. WILLIAM HARMON, a Waterloo osteopath, was president in 1956. The highlight of that year was again the Emancipation Day celebration when a picnic was held in August.

JUDGE WILLIAM W. PARKER, then a Waterloo attorney, was president in 1957. Judge Parker was Waterloo's first black judge and retired from that position to accept a position with the federal government. His term of office as president of NAACP was not an active one, but he was one of several blacks to seek a seat on the Waterloo Board of Education during the 1950s and 1960s.

ANNA MARIE WEEMS was president of NAACP here for about five years from 1958 to May 1963. An appearance at West High School by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1959, was one of the highlights of her presidency. She was influential in having him appear in Waterloo. During the early 1960s the branch supported picketing at several stores to protest the lack of black employment. Picketing was also done at a store with a lunch counter to protest the chain's refusal to serve blacks in the south. A youth council was formed again in Waterloo in 1960 and remained active for several years. Education became a prime target of the local branch in the 1960s when the branch charged the hiring and placing of black teachers was biased. At that time there were five black teachers in the district, all located at Grant and Longfellow schools. The branch was very active in 1959 to 1961, but inactive for a time in 1962, when it again nearly lost its national charter.

DR. WARREN NASH, Waterloo physician, became president in 1963 and served in that capacity until 1969, when he cited a need to devote more time to his medical practice. Racial tension was high in Waterloo several times during his presidency of the branch. During that time a civil rights commission was formed here and several outside commissions and committees studied the situation. In 1966, Dr. Nash said an investigation by the National Council of Churches "points up the lack of communication, the feeling of alienation, the frustration and despair that many Waterloo Negroes feel....This is what we all should be alarmed about - that here are people who believe that Waterloo wants them only if they stay in 'their place' - the bottom." That time also marked a move for nonviolence by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the nation and leaders of the NAACP in Waterloo.

Education and the Waterloo Schools were the main issue of contention with the NAACP during REVEREND PERCY BURT's term as president in 1969. That year, the branch supported Dr. Robert Harvey as a school board member and he served in that office for three years. Reverend Burt is still pastor of Calvary Baptist Church and active in the local branch. Much of the time of members in 1969 was devoted to campaigning for Dr. Harvey.

91. 41.05

SAUL AUSTIN, a Waterloo teacher who is not assistant principal at East High School, was president of the branch in 1970. Education and employment were again the main topics of discussion and the local branch conducted a lengthy study of a racial outburst during an East-West football game in the fall. The branch also continued working toward desegregation of the Waterloo schools - an accomplishment which did not take place, except for open enrollment, until September 1973.

SINCE 1971, the issues facing the NAACP have continued to be education, employment and policy relations. PRESIDENTS SINCE THAT TIME INCLUDE:

.... J. RUSSELL LOWE, assistant principal at Bunger Junior High, he was also assistant principal at East High. He was president from 1971 to 1973. Lowe also served for several years on the board and as president of Operation Threshold, representing the NAACP.

.... REVEREND STAN KENNEDY, the fourth white person to hold the office of president of NAACP. Reverend Kennedy is Urban Minister for the United Methodist Church and is active in many other community organizations. He was president from 1974 to 1977.

.... RUTH B. ANDERSON, current president, associate professor of social work at the University of Northern Iowa. She has been active in NAACP for many years and served as education chairperson for the branch during much of the desegregation process of the Waterloo Schools. Mrs. Anderson says, "We can see how much - and yet, how little - has changed. Some of the early goals have been reached, but many things remain to be done. We still need to fight for achievement of freedom - real freedom - for all."