

Ruth Harrod Morgan

Headstone Dedication

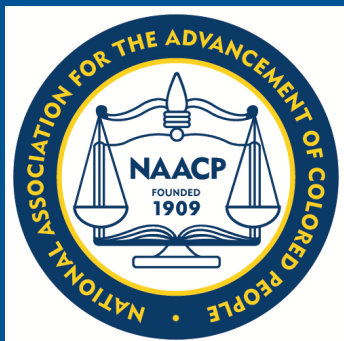
A Legacy Remembered and Honored



Pleasant Grove Baptist Church Cemetery

1269 Morphus Bridge Road Wendell, North Carolina

October 15, 2021 4:30 p.m.



NAACP

Wendell-Wake
County Branch



Editorial Comment

A Tribute to Wendell's Pioneer Black Leader

When Ruth Morgan left Eagle Rock for St. Louis, Mo., she left behind a lot more than just memories. She left a lifetime of civic, civil, religious and social contributions that pleased many, offended many but benefitted all.

Mrs. Morgan, who moved to Wendell in 1923, quickly became a leader in the black community. Her bold decision to defy the local registrar and become the first black to vote in Wendell was only the beginning of her prolific impact on the community.

Among her accomplishments and activities:

- She was instrumental in forming the Wake County-Wendell branch of the NAACP.
- She received a citation from the Raleigh-Wake County NAACP for bringing in more new members to the organization than anyone else.
- She was active in the Wendell Home Demonstration Club and later became its president.
- She was a member of the League of Women Voters.
- She formed the "70 Plus" club, a group of elderly citizens who met in her home for companionship.
- She was active in the Interdenominational Ushers Association as well as Pleasant Grove Baptist Church.
- She taught at the North Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf in Raleigh.

• She was a substitute teacher at the former Riley Hill School.

• She successfully led the fight in 1941 to keep the all-black Carver School at its present site when it burned.

Through all these activities, Mrs. Morgan had but one simple desire: to see blacks become fully integrated into American life. And despite the resentment toward her for upsetting the status quo along the way, Mrs. Morgan worked toward this one simple but noble goal in her own quiet, civil, articulate way, without bitterness.

Perhaps the best testament to her character, however, was her determination to get an education against all odds. She planned to enroll at Shaw University but was told that the boarding school she attended—Franklinton Christian College—lacked the proper accreditation. Her school records had also been lost in a fire at the school.

Not to be denied an education, Mrs. Morgan enrolled at Wakefield-Zebulon High School—at the same time her daughter was attending the school—and completed two years of classwork. From there, she attended Shaw off and on, finally earning a bachelor's degree in education in 1955 at the age of 52.

We hope Mrs. Morgan gets to make an occasional visit from St. Louis, Mo., back to the town she still calls home and where she did her best to accomplish what she believed in.

DEDICATION OF THE RUTH MORGAN HEADSTONE

WELCOME Tony DeRico
President
Wendell Wake County NAACP

INVOCATION Rev. Asa L. Bell Jr., Pastor
Pleasant Grove Baptist Church

THE OCCASION Eugene Phillips
Michael Vereen
Wendell Wake NAACP

REMARKS..... **FAMILY**
Geraldine Johnson
Shelia Moore

WENDELL WAKE NAACP/PLEASANT GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

Mary E. Perry

WENDELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Steve Brown

UNVEILING OF HEADSTONE

Tony DeRico
President
Wendell Wake NAACP

CLOSING REMARKS Tony DeRico
President

Thank you to those who helped to make this possible

Paul White

Universal Chevrolet

Micky & Mary Kathryn Phillips

Hugh & Mary Jo Cashion

Ray & Carol Hinnant

Enoch & Marion Holloway

Wendell Historical Society

Diversified Benefits Administrators LLC



First Black Voter Recalls Hard Times

by Barry Teater

When 80-year-old Ruth Morgan left Eagle Rock for St. Louis, Mo., on Sunday, she left behind a lifetime of memories—including some she would rather forget.

As a civil rights pioneer in the 1930s—a time when Jim Crow still was on the minds of blacks—Mrs. Morgan made quite a stir in Southern, rural, white Wendell.

In 1932 Mrs. Morgan, then 29, decided she would register to vote. But after making her intentions known to the registrar in Wendell, she found that registering wasn't all that simple. It would take more than U.S. citizenship and 18 years of age, she was told.

"He required that I write a section of the Constitution from memory," Mrs. Morgan recalled in an interview in her home at Eagle Rock. "My sister-in-law went with me; she got angry from the start and left."

Mrs. Morgan consulted a lawyer from the NAACP who told her she legally didn't have to memorize the Constitution in order to register to vote. The illegal requirement wouldn't hold up in court, he told her.

But Mrs. Morgan desperately wanted to vote for Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1932 election, and a court battle would surely have forced her to wait until the 1936 election to vote.

So, she persisted, attempting to do what no other black had done in Wendell—register to vote.

But she didn't receive much encouragement from her fellow blacks. The dean of religion at Shaw University reminded her that others before her had been tarred and feathered when they had tried to register to vote elsewhere.

"He said, 'Fools go in where the angels fear to tread.' I said, 'Open up this door and let this fool walk in,'" Mrs. Morgan recalled with a laugh.

And Mrs. Morgan did walk in—into the registrar's office—with the section of the Constitution memorized verbatim and written



Ruth Morgan

on a piece of paper.

"When I carried it to the registrar," she said, "he had to open his Constitution. He said, 'Well, I reckon I have to register her. She got the punctuation right and everything.'"

Mrs. Morgan finally got to vote in the 1932 election, and Franklin D. Roosevelt was a landslide winner.

Registering to vote, however, was only the first step in Mrs. Morgan's push for civil rights. "After I registered," she said, "I worked harder."

She went on to help other blacks register in Wake, Franklin, Johnston and Nash counties. She also started writing to politicians, including a letter to Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor, complaining about a "whites only" sign she saw posted at a bus station in South Hill, Va.

"I wrote letters to everybody," Mrs. Morgan recalled. "Everytime I was saying and doing things, I was hoping it would

(continued on page 3)

GOLD LEAF FARMER, Wendell, North Carolina, Thursday, August 4, 1983 3

Pioneer Voter Leaves for St. Louis

(Continued from page 1)
make us better. I have always helped where I thought help was needed."

Her activism was often resented among whites, however, and she believes the resentment may have turned to violence on the night of Jan. 27, 1939.

Late that night, Mrs. Morgan's two-story frame house on Morphis Bridge Road burned to the ground. Despite the frantic efforts of her husband, Waymon, a Wendell barber, the couple's only son—11-year-old James Henry—died in the fire.

"We never knew what caused the fire," said Mrs. Morgan's daughter, Geraldine Holt, who escaped the burning building. "The fire was so intense."

Firemen at the scene said faulty wiring likely caused the blaze, but no exact cause was pinpointed. Mrs. Morgan and her daughter—although they have no evidence—believe to this day that the fire was intentionally set.

Mrs. Morgan, however, didn't let the tragedy deter her from doing what she believed was right—

pushing for desegregation and civil rights.

Mrs. Holt said her mother's commitment to doing what she believes is right has always been a trait in Mrs. Morgan. "My mother gets that righteous indignation, but she doesn't lose her cool," she said.

Mrs. Morgan, who moved to St. Louis, Mo., on Sunday to be closer to her daughter and two great-grandchildren, was honored by friends, family and local dignitaries—black and white—Friday at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, where she is a member.