

ATTACHMENT D:

Articles about Ruby McKnight Williams;
Preface to Williams' Pasadena Heritage Oral History
Project Interview

People You'd Like to Know

Ruby Williams Solves Problems With Right Attitudes, Smile

By MARGARET STOVALL

Mrs. Melvin (Ruby McKnight) Williams said she has found that "a smile and the right attitude can make every situation sort of fade."

Mrs. Williams is rarely seen not smiling. She is also a dynamo of action, particularly in those things which concern her own race — and most especially the young people.

Citywide she is probably best known for playing the key role which won her street, Westgate Street, a Pasadena Beautiful award for being the most improved neighborhood in the city on a clean-up, paint-up, fix-up basis. The street won the award two years in succession.

Proud of Well-Kept Westgate Street

"Now the street is handsome year-round," Mrs. Williams said. "I am so proud. It is well kept from one end to the other."

She was a member of the National Youth Board of the NAACP for seven years and is a past president of the Pasadena Chapter, NAACP. She is secretary of a group sponsoring the Northwest Teen Post. "We are very proud of this activity because when there is any rumble of trouble, this membership closes right in. I am sure we have been a great help. We hope to be able to expand this program to reach a great many more young people."

She added, "With young people you have to interest them in one way in order to guide them in another. This is where the activities at the Teen Post come in."

Mrs. Williams is a member of CURAC ("Knowing the Pepper area as I have known it for so long I was very happy to be on this."), is active in the League of Women Voters, is currently president of the International Women's Club, an organization started 25 years ago by Anna Dozier (now vice president) for the purpose of understanding through inter-racial get-togethers.

Almost Every Nationality Represented

"We have almost every nationality represented in our 250 members," Mrs. Williams said. "I think I can safely say there isn't a woman in the organization who thinks of color or race."

Mrs. Williams came to Pasadena 39 years ago, holding teaching credentials and very much interested in interesting others to a pre-school mental testing program she had developed and had accepted by Columbia University. "The depression had left its scars, however, and such a thing was not possible."

She was a native of Kansas, had graduated from Kansas State, and taught for awhile in Topeka. In Pasadena she was told the district had no Negro teachers so she became the first Negro person to be hired in a clerical post.

"I like to think about Pasadena," she said, "I have been here long enough to have seen the miraculous changes. The year I came here and was on that clerical job a woman I worked with suggested we have lunch at the YWCA. They said they were sorry but I couldn't come in to lunch. Now here I am a member of the board at the YWCA and a part of what is going on."

Mrs. Williams has worked as cashier for a large insur-



BELIEVES IN SMILE — Mrs. Melvin (Ruby McKnight) Williams is convinced most of the world's ills could be cured "by smiles, the right attitude and forgetting skin tones." Mrs. Williams is president of the International Women's Club, active in CURAC and NAACP.

ance company, as interviewer for the Federal Employment Service, has sold insurance and has sold real estate, which she still occasionally does on request. "I seem to always be saying 'Yes' if somebody wants me for something," she said.

When she met her husband (he is a retired state employe) he was running a market so she was cashier for him. Melvin Williams is admittedly one of his wife's greatest admirers and he says so. "It's better to get one flower when you're alive than a whole bouquet when you're dead," he explained. He is an ardent worker in the beautiful home garden of which both are very proud. Gardening is one of her hobbies, too. "And I love to cook," she added. "The other thing I enjoy most is watching people enjoy my cooking."

Mrs. Williams credits her family with giving her a sound philosophy. "I am sure it is a little different from that of many of my race because I see people as people at the same time knowing very well I am a Negro. Therefore, I take that and then forget it. This makes one an individual. I grew up in an integrated state but very early in life I found out we didn't go to the same schools. It was my parents who insisted, 'What do you care? You are going to school and it is a good school.' Because of them all of my family became educated where others fell by the wayside."

"My life has been varied," she concluded, "but one thing I have always fought for — the realization that all of us have just about the same attributes. If we can erase the feeling of skin tones, just about all our troubles will be over."

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Activist, 90, Sees the Fruits of Her Labor for Equality

By LORETTA SCHERTZ KELLER
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Ruby McKnight Williams has 19 commendations on her living room wall, and a drawerful that she hasn't gotten around to framing yet.

One was awarded to her in 1983 for 50 years of service to the Pasadena National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People, of which she was president for 16 years, and where, at 90, she still works two afternoons a week.

But during a recent interview, she was not interested in dwelling on her accolades, which include being named president emeritus of the NAACP branch. Instead, she said, "I want to give you my experience."

As it turns out, Williams' story provides a window on 60 years of the black experience in the San Gabriel Valley.

She came to Pasadena in 1930, eager to continue the kindergarten teaching she had begun in Topeka, Kan., where she was born.

"My great-grandfather was the first in the family to come to California," she said. "He came cross-country in 1849 as a cook for a wagon train. When he came back and talked about picking oranges off the trees, my grandmother kept in mind, 'California.' She came out here in 1906."

She reached for a photo of her four uncles, all in Army uniform. "They served in the Spanish-American War and then came out

to California," she said. "My mother followed, and I followed her. The first thing I did after arriving was to join the NAACP."

"It's hard to picture Pasadena as it was when I came here. People can't visualize how limited it was for blacks."

"It was after the Great Depression, and in Los Angeles they weren't hiring teachers. In Pasadena they told me they don't hire black teachers."

"So I looked in the paper and saw that there was a professional women's employment service. They were quite surprised to see me. It seems that they didn't expect my race to come into the place."

"They asked me if I'd like to be a governess, and I said, 'No, not necessarily.' Then the manager came out to speak to me, and I was hired to take over the new colored women's department of the Pasadena Employment Service. The service was later taken over by the state."

"I found out," she said, "that no [black] men were employed by Pasadena except garbage men and two or three men who swept around City Hall. As for [black] women, even the attendants in the restrooms at the Rose Bowl had never been colored. Things as simple as that."

"I once insulted the Pasadena Board of Directors. I said, at a meeting, 'What's the difference between Pasadena and Mississippi? Except for the sunshine, I don't see any difference.'



KAREN TAPIA / Los Angeles Times

When Ruby McKnight Williams first arrived in California, she joined the NAACP and has been active in the organization ever since.

"One of them said, 'Then why don't you go to Mississippi?' and I answered, 'Because it's beautiful here.'"

"Thursday was my field day. I used to go up and down Colorado Street and surprise everybody by asking about employment for colored women. [One man] who owned a department store in Pasadena said, 'I wouldn't have a customer left if I hired a colored clerk.' I told him, 'I'm going to

wait around until that day comes.'"

During her NAACP tenure, Williams took up the cause of school and housing desegregation. Twice, she visited the U.S. Supreme Court to witness integration decisions. She also fought and won local redevelopment battles.

Meanwhile, in 1946, she married Melvin Williams, and together they worked to beautify their neighborhood and street. In 1966,

Westgate Street won a Pasadena Beautiful Award. Melvin Williams died in 1988.

Although the couple never had children of their own, she said working with young people was her greatest satisfaction. She served for six years as adviser to the NAACP National Youth Work Committee. She's convinced that educating black children to believe in themselves is the key to equality.

"When I was a child and a group of children called me and my brother 'niggers,' I came home and told my mother. 'Is that your name?' she asked. I said, 'No.' My mother said, 'Then they weren't talking to you.' After that my brother and I were able to face that group without running."

"You have to start when they're young—to put into their heads, 'You can do anything that any other kind can do.'"

Ruby M. Williams:

ps n. 1-3-83

15 years of caring



RUBY MCKNIGHT WILLIAMS

Ruby McKnight Williams, by 1966 already a veteran in the civil rights movement, was asleep late on a seasonably warm August night when the phone rang. The message was urgent:

Angry, frustrated black teen-agers were banding together on Fair Oaks Avenue in northwest Pasadena. Impassioned by their contemporaries' actions in south-central Los Angeles, some wanted to make a similarly dramatic showing of their feelings.

"The Watts riots were on," Mrs. Williams recalled in an interview, "and Pasadena was on the verge of the same thing.

"... We were called at 3:30 in the morning and the youths had gotten out of hand. They were screaming, 'Burn!' — they thought they had to imitate L.A. and Detroit."

"Miz Williams," as she is called by those who know her, went into the street with Charles Taliaferro, who also still resides in the area. After what she estimated was an hour of talking with the leaders, "we were able to stop that disturbance that would have ended up in, possibly, burning."

How did she sell her advice of pacifism?

"We tried to prove to them that it wasn't the thing to do," she said. "If they burned things up, what better would they be? ... We promised them that we would work for more jobs and better recreation."

Mediator Within the system. Always *there*. Those are descriptions often heard of Ruby McKnight Williams as she steps down today after 15 years as president of the Pasadena branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Stephen H. Mack is taking over the volunteer job.

Taliaferro, who placed that 3:30 a.m. phone call to Mrs. Williams, said he credits her for "carrying the NAACP (in Pasadena) on her back."

And, while Taliaferro acknowledged

that Mrs. Williams has come under criticism for not being as militant as some in the black community would prefer, he said her consistency has ensured effectiveness.

"She's always been aggressive against wrong, but reasonable," he said. "She's always been on the positive bent."

Attorney Walter Shatford, a Pasadena City College trustee and longtime member of the NAACP, described Mrs. Williams as "middle class in a lot of her outlooks." But more importantly, Shatford added, Mrs. Williams "has been there

every day . . ." when those advocating more "rigid" approaches have not.

The daughter of a Topeka, Kan., stone mason, Mrs. Williams reflects that she grew into middle age in an era when painstakingly incremental progress was the best that blacks could hope for. Nowhere could she have found that more true than in Pasadena, the town she came west to in 1932 as an unmarried woman.

The city's neighborhoods were locked in segregation by restrictive covenants. By Mrs. Williams' own count, only three blacks were on the municipal payroll. Blacks were not hired as teachers. Blacks could not swim at the Brookside Park pool — except by themselves on the day before it was cleaned.

"In Topeka, we had some segregation, but nothing like it was here," said Mrs. Williams, who places her age "somewhere" between 50 and 100. "I'm not going to say Topeka was ideal, but there was more opportunity there than I saw for years after I came to Pasadena . . ."

"If you didn't have on a black dress and white apron, you couldn't get in anywhere" in Pasadena looking for a job.

A school teacher in Topeka before moving West, Mrs. Williams can speak firsthand of the discriminatory hiring practices formerly prevalent in the city. She was told outright that blacks did not teach in Pasadena.

So, after later accepting a job at a job-placement center for women, Mrs. Williams, a graduate of Kansas State University, went about trying to change Pasadena. Shatford, the Pasadena attorney, credits Mrs. Williams with "succeeding in getting stores to hire black help (and) putting an end to some pretty racist hiring practices and procedures."

"It takes a long time for people to learn," said Mrs. Williams. "It isn't something that they want to accept immediately."

And, while Mrs. Williams believes Pasadena has made long strides in its racial policies, she pointed to the school desegregation battles of the '70s as a more recent example of bias. She recalled one evening meeting at a then-soon-to-be integrated school in Pasadena's affluent Hastings Ranch neighborhood

"I sat in the back of the room, and these women carried on as if we were going to set a cage of lions in their area. They kept saying, 'Those people, those people.' I held my hand up to speak last.

"When I started up the aisle, all I could see were eyes, and I took my time and let them see me. I said, 'This is the greatest surprise of my life — to see people who I thought were most intelligent act the way they did tonight. I hope I will live to see a change.'"

"I finished by saying, 'The young people will be coming to this school next Monday — and I will be with them.' They thought I was going to raise sand, and I quieted the whole thing.

"They went out of there just beaten. They didn't know what to say."

Now, Mrs. Williams is returning to Westgate Street to the home she and her husband of 40 years, Melvin, share. It was Melvin's heart attack last February, she said, that prompted her to pass on the NAACP leadership.

She said she leaves proud of the accomplishments made by those of her race and hopeful for the future.

"We have come a long way," Mrs. Williams said. "We were brought over here into a country where slaves didn't know a language. We've made extremely good progress..."

"I'm hoping we'll forget the color of skin and the difference of facial looks and accept people as people."

Ruby Williams to be honored

PSN 4-25-83

Mrs. Ruby McKnight Williams, retired president of the Pasadena Branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will be honored at a dinner celebration Thursday at 6 p.m. at the Pasadena Hilton Hotel.

A highlight of the affair will be the official naming of Mrs. Williams as president emeritus of the Pasadena Branch of the NAACP. The celebration recognizes her 18 continuous years of leadership of the organization.

Tommy McMuthins, vice president and manager of the Crocker National Bank in the City of Commerce, is chairman of the steering committee planning the event. Charles Cherniss, editor of the Star-News, will serve as honorary chairperson.

Mrs. Williams, a native of Kansas, moved to Pasadena more than a half century ago. She came to Pasadena looking for a job as a teacher, only to be told, "we don't hire colored teachers in Pasadena." Mrs. Williams subsequently found work as a job placement personnel worker.

However, she became known in the community as an aggressive and outspoken civil rights leader. During her tenure as president of the Pasadena



RUBY WILLIAMS

Branch of NAACP, she witnessed many historical firsts in Pasadena including the Pepper Redevelopment Project, integration of the Pasadena schools and the election of a black woman to the Pasadena Board of City Directors and as mayor of Pasadena.

Ticket information is available by calling the NAACP office, 793-1293.

BN 5-11-83

Ruby Williams: honors from the honored

Retired 50-year NAACP leader to continue the crusade as president emeritus

By JACKIE KNOWLES
People Section Editor

Ruby Williams isn't one to let other people out-give her.

After several standing ovations from a crowd of about 350 people and dozens of commendations, she gave a few plaques of her own at a retirement dinner in her honor at the Pasadena Hilton Thursday.

The sprightly leader of the NAACP for 50 years, Mrs. Williams wanted equality even as she stepped down after 15 years as president of the Pasadena chapter; she presented plaques to her office staff — Shirley Fields, Eula Johnson and Beornored Hockenhill.

The finale was a standing ovation for Melvin Williams, her husband of 40 years, when the staff presented him with a plaque of his own.

"He sure has worked, I'm telling you," she said. With her shock of white hair barely showing over the lectern, the diminutive Mrs. Williams slipped out her familiar iron hand softened with a gentle manner as she admonished the audience after an earlier standing ovation to sit down, she hadn't finished yet.

She wanted people to see the 10 youngsters who had come to her dinner — some who had worked up the courage to come in to help at the Pasadena NAACP office, and others who had looked in on her husband, Melvin, after he was ill.

Speaking in her slow, deliberate style that has calmed many heated meetings, she lauded Pasadena for the strides made since she came to the city and couldn't get a teaching job because she was black.

Since she began her crusade for equality in Pasadena, the city has seen black employment move from only menial jobs to management positions in business and government, the end of restrictive covenants, and the desegregation of the public schools.

The crowd applauded when she said, "We have a black mayor, but my question is, 'Why don't we have more blacks in the administration given the percentage of blacks in the community?'"

She was interrupted by applause again as she continued in the dry, sardonic manner that has helped her get her way, "I shall visit City Hall before long and start asking that question."

A raffle of voiced approval swept across the room when she said, "The thing that is free to all



Tom Van Dyke / Star-News

Ruby McKnight Williams, left, was lauded by a crowd of 350 people at her NAACP retirement dinner; Mabel Hurd, Mae Harvey and Kathryn Carr joined in

of us is love."

Mrs. Williams didn't let resentment stand in her way when she was denied a teaching job. She went to an employment service for professionals, which also shocked people because no black had ever done that before either.

She said she became the first black clerical worker in Pasadena, and went on to campaign for jobs for other blacks.

"It's probably a good thing I didn't get a teaching job," she said, "because I couldn't have said or done the things I've done because no principal would have liked it."

In her own low-keyed way, she gave a pep talk about the NAACP and how it was founded after a lynching and riot in Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Ohio.

"William Walling wrote: 'This is a blot on America and who is going to do something about it?'" she said. Mary White Ovington, a wealthy white woman, was the one who gathered Jew, Gentile and blacks together to found the NAACP in New York City in 1910, she said.

Begun with seven whites and one black, the NAACP today is principally black. The Pasadena

chapter has about 900 members, she said.

Mrs. Williams recalled when the Pasadena NAACP, under the leadership of Edna Griffin, sued the city because blacks were allowed to use the public swimming pool in Brookside Park only on Tuesdays from noon to 5 p.m., just before the water was changed.

She recalled the efforts of Sam Sheats, who took the schools to task for not living up to the 1954 Supreme Court decision on integration.

Referring to her introduction by Star-News Senior Managing Editor Wanda Tucker, Mrs. Williams said, "Yes, there were mountains to be climbed." When she was made president emeritus, she assured the audience she is not going to buy a rocking chair. (She declined to say how old she is. "I've been telling people for years, when I get to be 100, I'll invite you to my birthday party.")

"We've got to climb some more mountains," she said. Stephen H. Mack succeeds Mrs. Williams as president of the NAACP.

Pasadena Mayor Loretta Thompson-Glickman presented Mrs. Williams with a special pen from the city, greetings from Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and a certificate of appreciation from that city.

Others making special presentations were County Supervisor Mike Antonovich, Assemblyman Richard Alatorre, D-Los Angeles; Jim Johnson of the Pasadena Urban League; Betty Holliday for Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; Sandra Knox for the Pasadena Neighborhood Housing Service; Opal Hampton for Phi Delta Kappa Sorority; Maceo Moody for the Pasadena Altadena Links; Elbie Hickambottom, Marjorie Wyatt and Supt. Ramon Cortines for the Pasadena Unified School District; Clarence Clayton Moore for the Harriet Tubman Club; Norma Coombs for the YWCA; John Mance for the national board of the NAACP, which also honored Melvin Williams; Jose DeSosa for the San Fernando Branch of the NAACP, and Vera Lee for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

Ray Bartlett was master of ceremonies, Versie Mae Richardson sang, the John Muir High School Madrigal Singers performed. The honorary chairman of the event was Charles Cherniss, editor of the Star-News. Tommy McMullins, vice president and manager of the Crocker National Bank in the city of Commerce, was chairman of the steering committee.

Longtime activist turns 100

NAACP leader feted
with birthday party

By Gigi Hanna
STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — No one is quite sure about the age of civil rights pioneer Ruby McKnight Williams.

But there are rumors. The lady wasn't revealing her age. Even at her 100th birthday party.

Williams was surrounded by a group of friends yesterday at the Pasadena branch office of the NAACP for a luncheon and cake to celebrate the occasion.

Party sponsors said they had heard from friends that Williams' birthday Tuesday was her centennial. But when asked what year she was born, Williams feigned a faulty memory.

"I don't remember, I was too small," she joked. "As soon as you start talking about age, people start pitying you."

But it wasn't pity that brought about 20 friends to the surprise party. It was a celebration of her lifelong struggle for civil rights.

"You are beautiful, you've done so much for the community," past NAACP president Effie Sapp told Williams.

Beornored Hockenhill, who served as Williams' vice-president in 1959, agreed.

"She worked in the community, in the churches," he said. "She went into stores that didn't have black employees or were mistreating them, and she would go talk with the owners. She's done everything you would expect a woman to do to help others."

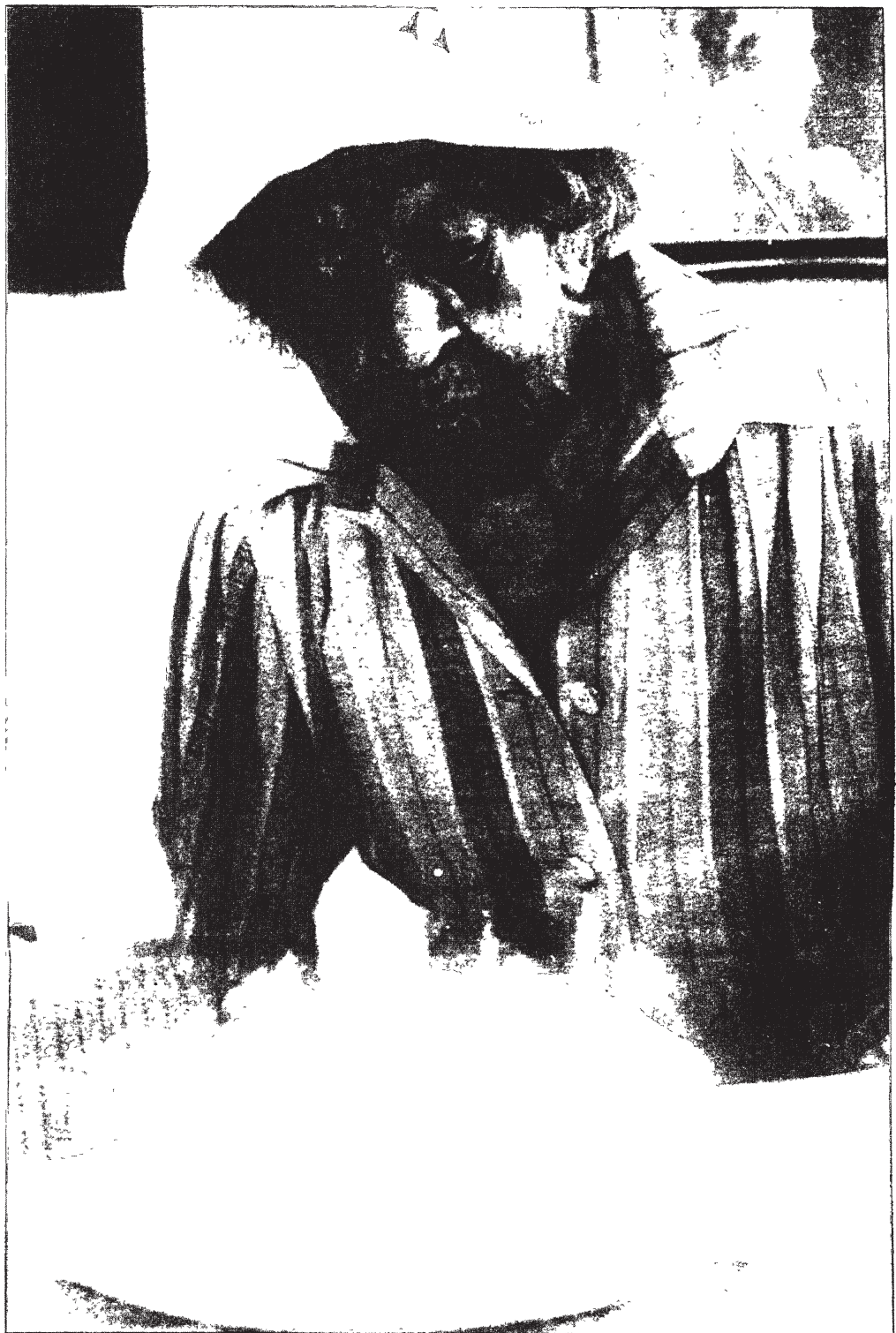
Williams was president of the Pasadena branch of the NAACP in 1959 and again from 1969 to 1982, said current branch president Taylor Morton.

She still serves on the executive board.

When Williams moved to Pasadena in 1930, African Americans were refused entry into restaurants and hotels, and prevented from buying homes in white neighborhoods.

They were also denied entry to city pools, except at times just before the water was changed.

Williams refused to talk



Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

BLOWING OUT the candles, Ruby McKnight Williams celebrates her 100th birthday.

about the past.

"There have been too many changes to talk about," she said. "When I joined the NAACP it was the only organization that was doing anything."

Board member Walter Shatford said Williams made an invaluable contribution to local NAACP efforts.

"There were times when this branch would be absolutely

dead if someone hadn't worked, and that someone was Ruby," he said. "There were years when she *was* the NAACP. As president, she carried on the good fight."

It is that kind of dedication that continues to help the civil rights cause, Morton said.

"Ruby has been at the forefront of civil rights in Pasadena for over three

decades, and she does it with courage, dignity and clarity," he said.

She even did some work at yesterday's party.

After commenting on the sad state of the furniture in the branch office, she said she would get her chair reupholstered and challenged each board member to do the same.

Activist, 104, in coma

Williams a veteran civil rights crusader

By Mary Schubert
STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — Centenarian Ruby McKnight Williams, a lifelong crusader for civil rights and longtime president of the local NAACP chapter, is hospitalized from a recent illness that left her in a coma, hospital officials said Friday.

Williams, whose 105th birthday is Aug. 30, is undergoing treatment at Huntington Transitional Care Center, a facility of Huntington Hospital, said spokeswoman Pam Clark.

Last month, neighbors and friends threw Williams an early birthday party at which she received a proclamation from Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard and a commendation from Rep. James Rogan, R-Pasadena, said Emina Darakjy, president of the East Arroyo Residents Association.

Accounts vary on when Williams moved to Pasadena from her native Topeka, Kan., ranging from the early 1930s or late 1940s. College educated with a teaching resume, she couldn't find a job in the classroom but became the first African American to be hired by the city in a clerical post.

Back then, African Americans were barred from local hotels and restaurants, and from buying homes in white neighborhoods. The only time African Americans could swim in the old Brookside Plunge was on the day before the water was changed.

Over the years, she and the NAACP battled to integrate Pasadena classrooms. When baseball legend Jackie Robinson died, Williams was among those who eulogized the Dodger great during an October 1972 memorial in front of Pasadena City Hall.

Her activism sometimes threatened her safety.

In 1975, Williams was among 10 prominent local African-Americans who received death threats. She was NAACP chapter president at the time, and anonymous letters warned that she and the others would be killed unless they stopped advocating school integration and busing.

She served as president of the Pasadena chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, retiring her post in January 1983 after 15 years.

Darakjy said she visited Williams on Thursday in the treatment facility.

At the early birthday party on July 18, held at The Chandler School with about 140 in attendance, Williams enjoyed the food and the company. "She had a great time. She was laughing, she was talking," Darakjy said.

WILLIAMS

Civil rights activist in coma

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Ten years ago, the NAACP dedicated a small park at Arroyo Boulevard and Westgate Street to Williams and her husband, Melvin, in gratitude for their long record of community service, Darakjy noted. The corner park, northeast of the Rose Bowl, includes eucalyptus trees, native plants and colorful flowers.

"It was just a corner that was full of weeds, and it's not too far from where she lives. Before the party, she said: 'I don't want anything. I just want more plants in that park,'" Darakjy said.

Former civil rights leader Williams dies at 104

By Mary Schubert
and Emanuel Parker
STAFF WRITERS

PASADENA — Ruby McKnight Williams, for more than 50 years an aggressive and often outspoken civil rights leader and past president of the local NAACP chapter, died Monday, City Councilwoman Joyce Streater announced at the start of the City Council meeting. Williams was 104. Huntington Hospital spokeswoman Pam Clark confirmed that Williams died at 3 p.m. at the Huntington Transitional Care Center. She was admitted

Thursday in a coma after a housekeeper arrived at her home and found her on the floor. The cause of death was not immediately disclosed.

Williams held leadership positions in the local NAACP for half a century and was elected president of the Pasadena chapter in 1968 and served 15 turbulent years before retiring in 1983.

She arrived in Pasadena at a time when blacks could not get jobs as nurses, police officers, firefighters, store clerks or in city government.

She fought to integrate Pasadena

Please turn to RIGHTS / A6

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RIGHTS

Williams dedicated life to community

Continued from A1

schools and was among those who eulogized baseball legend Jackie Robinson, a Pasadena native, in October 1972 on the steps of Pasadena City Hall.

Choked with emotion, Streater paid tribute to Williams.

"She worked so long and so hard for positive racial relations in this city," Streater said.

Long after Williams stepped down as president of the Pasadena NAACP chapter, she continued to be a force in the civil rights arena, Streater said.

"It is really hard to lose the mentors and people you've looked up to for so long," said the councilwoman, in whose district Williams lived.

Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard noted that he was among 140 people who greeted Williams on July 18, at an early birthday party organized by the East Arroyo Residents Association.

"She was to be 105 years old on Aug. 30, but her health was failing," Bogaard told the audience. Despite Williams' frailty and advanced years, "she sat all afternoon on a bench with no back," talking to friends and neighbors, the mayor said.

"Ruby Williams was a great lady and a leader for Pasadena," said Charles "Buddy" Bereal, local NAACP president. "I didn't always agree with her 100 percent. But she would talk to me and tell me things to do, and I did them even though I didn't want to; I had that much respect for her."

At the chapter's last two banquets, the organization made a point of honoring Williams, Bereal said. "We tried to do the best for Ruby because we knew it might be the last."

The NAACP's annual fundraising dinner is held in her honor and the Ruby McKnight Williams Award is presented to a local citizen who demonstrates excellence in community service.

Ten years ago, the East Arroyo Residents Association dedicated a small park at Arroyo Boulevard and Westgate Street to Williams and her late husband, Melvin, in gratitude for their long record of community service. The corner

park, northeast of the Rose Bowl, includes eucalyptus trees, native plants and colorful flowers.

Williams moved to California from Topeka, Kan., where she had attended college and taught school.

Upon arriving in Pasadena, Williams found the school district would not hire "colored" teachers. That slight ignited her lifetime commitment to civil rights. She got a job as one of the first black clerical workers in the city and worked to open up jobs for other blacks.

Williams also was the first African-American to serve on the board of directors for the local chapter of the American Red Cross. She also served on the city Recreation Commission.

Sometimes her efforts put her in the line of fire.

In 1975, she was among 10 prominent African-Americans in Pasadena targeted with death threats. She was NAACP chapter president then, and anonymous letters warned that she and the others would be killed unless they stopped advocating school integration and busing.

Funeral arrangements for Williams are pending.

One of our best passes

EDITORIAL

WHEN you're as powerful a moral and physical force as Ruby McKnight Williams was in Pasadena during her more than six decades of residence, the dream of eternal life does come true.

Sadly, Williams died Monday here in town, aged 104.

months short of being one of those rare people in history to have lived in three different centuries

But Williams didn't need such minor statistical notoriety. She was clearly a rare person in history anyway by virtue of the profound weight of her personality, which she exercised in the fight for the civil rights of African Americans and others in Pasadena from the day she arrived from Kansas

Which exact day that was, which exact year, even, were long matters of dispute. Williams was one of those people who get a little cagey about such matters. Some folks say it was in 1930 that Williams arrived from Topeka, Kan. Some say 1936. Williams wasn't saying. But, having been a kindergarten teacher in Kansas, Williams naturally figured there might be some work teaching here. Instead, here's what she found, as one of the dozens of Star-News stories on Williams over the decades puts it: "Pasadena's hospitality toward blacks was on a par with what she'd encountered in the South. The school district wasn't interested in hiring blacks as teachers. Doors were closed to blacks as nurses, police officers, firefighters, store clerks and City Hall workers, unless they took out the garbage or cleaned the toilets."

Ruby McKnight Williams gave Pasadena a dose of 'moral suasion' to be fair and drop the color barrier when the city harbored prejudice.

Williams was not one to take such a dominant civic attitude lying down. She finagled a job in that Depression time as head of the Colored Women's Division of the city's employment bureau — and she didn't sit behind a desk. Rather, she went out into the tony shops and businesses of the day and hounded managers and owners — they'd run for the back room as soon as they saw her — into eventually hiring black women. Her strategy, when informed that no one was

available to speak with her, was to pull up a chair, pull out a book and announce that she was in no rush. No rush at all.

She once insulted a former city manager by comparing this city to Mississippi. "Well, why did you come out here?" was his retort. "It's difficult to make people understand that was Pasadena."

That it isn't Pasadena any longer is in great part a testament to Williams. During her decades of leadership of the local branch of the NAACP, she rung the changes. It is amazing to recall that, during the school integration battles of the early 1970s, in which she played a key role, Williams was already considered an old woman.

If so, she was a very active old woman for almost 30 more years. Just months ago Williams appeared at a YWCA awards ceremony to a standing ovation from the crowd. Never giving up, never giving anything but her best, forever elegant all the while — Ruby McKnight Williams was among the best Pasadena has ever known and ever will know.

Service for Williams set Wednesday

PASADENA — The memorial service for local civil rights crusader Ruby McKnight Williams is scheduled for 10 a.m. Wednesday at Scott United Methodist Church, but officials at Mountain View Cemetery, Mortuary and Crematory said family members have not decided when Williams will be

interred. When burial does occur, it will be a private ceremony, they said. Plans call for Williams to be buried at Mountain View next to her husband, Milton, who died in 1988 at the age of 86.

Williams was 104 when she died Aug. 16 at Huntington Transitional Care Center. She went into

a coma after striking her head while getting out of the bathtub July 29.

She was president of the local NAACP chapter from 1968 to 1983 and held numerous other executive positions with a variety of local civic organizations over a 50-year period.

— From staff and wire reports

Memorial service set for civil rights leader

By Emanuel Parker
STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — A memorial service for local civil rights leader Ruby McKnight is set for Wednesday morning at Scott United Methodist Church. She died Aug. 16 at age 104.

McKnight's remains will be cremated and she will be laid to rest beside her husband, Milton, who died in 1988 at the age of 86, said Gloria Hammers, manager of family services at Mountain View Cemetery, Mortuary and Crematory in Altadena, which is handling the burial arrangements.

McKnight's parents, Edda and William Butler, and a sister, Mildred Jones, are also buried at Mountain View.

The Rev. Anita Valles will preside at the memorial service, scheduled for 10 a.m. at the church, at 444 N. Orange Grove Blvd.

The service will be followed by a private graveside interment for family members at Mountain View, 2400 N. Fair Oaks Ave.

The Coroner's Office ruled last week that McKnight's death was an accident, caused when she slipped, fell and hit her head while getting out of the bathtub July 29, said Lt. Cheryl MacWillie, a coroner's investigator.

She died at the Huntington Transitional Care Center, where she was admitted Aug. 12 in a coma.

McKnight held leadership positions with the local NAACP for half a century and was elected president of the Pasadena chapter in 1968 and served 15 years before retiring in 1983.

She is survived by her brother, William Thomas McKnight II, 97, who moved here from Cleveland in 1997 to be near his sister.

A LEADER WHO SOUGHT DIGNITY



Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

MEMORIAL SERVICES for Ruby McKnight Williams are held at Scott United Methodist Church in Pasadena.

Williams' quest for equality remembered

'Some people die old at 40. Others are young at 80. Ruby did better than both of those; she died young at 104.'

Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard

By Emanuel Parker
STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — Ruby McKnight Williams was eulogized Wednesday as an African-American leader who sought dignity for her people in an era that had no black police, firefighters, nurses or store clerks.

Pasadena Mayor Bill

Bogaard, who delivered the eulogy, said his presence at her memorial service — and the legal, social and moral changes that brought him there — was proof that Williams had been successful in her life's work.

"Her focus," Bogaard said, "was on injustice and racial bigotry; her plan was to build a better community."

About 100 people gathered Wednesday at Scott United

Methodist Church for the memorial service and reception for Williams. The Pasadena NAACP chapter president from 1968 to 1983 and pioneering civil rights crusader died Aug. 16 at 104.

Williams' remains were cremated and her family will place them next to her late husband, Milton, at a later date.

"Some people die old at 40,"

Please turn to **MEMORIAL / A6**



Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

MAURICE MORSE, who served in the NAACP in Pasadena under Ruby McKnight Williams, offers a warm greet-

ing to William T. McKnight, 98, Williams' brother, during the reception for memorial services on Wednesday.

MEMORIAL

Williams was dignified, forceful

Continued from A1

Bogaard said. "Others are young at 80. Ruby did better than both of those; she died young at 104."

The Rev. Dr. George F. Regas, pastor emeritus of All Saints Episcopal Church, noted Williams lived from 1894-1999. But he said it's the dash separating those dates — what she did in the intervening years — that made Williams special.

"We praise you for her courage and her profound commitment to the dignity of all people," Regas said. "This

world has more justice, is more beautiful, more peaceful, because she walked across it."

The Rev. Anita Valles delivered the sermon and said Williams was similar to Mary in the biblical story about spending lavishly on ointment to wash Christ's feet.

"Ruby didn't care what it cost her to serve the public. She saw a world with black, white, brown and yellow people, and that they could function and live together as God's equal children."

Williams "gave life to civil rights, especially here in Pasadena," Maurice Morse, an NAACP vice president under Williams, said at a reception.

"She was there for the children of the district when they integrated the schools. She was there on the city, fighting to get jobs for black people. Mrs.

Williams was a great lady."

Councilman Chris Holden recalled that in 1977 his Pasadena High School championship basketball team went on a European tour, and Williams invited members to the NAACP office to congratulate them.

"She paid us a lot of compliments," Holden said, "but she also reminded us that life was more than sports. She said life was about serving the community and helping those behind us. That stuck with me, and I've lived by her credo."

Del Yarbrough, who worked with Williams at the NAACP, said he recalls the dignified yet forceful way she took care of business.

"Because of that dignity, she was able to confront issues directly without offending people," he said.

PSN 9-5-99

In memory of a freedom fighter

Another great freedom fighter was laid to rest. Her battle against injustice and racial bigotry in Pasadena is well documented. She lived to see some major accomplishment but at the same time there has been erosion of many of those achievements.

What monument will be erected in her honor? She was one of the great ladies of Pasadena, making it a much better place for us all.

The honorable Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard spoke very passionately about Ruby McKnight Williams' battles and accomplishments.

Ruby McKnight Williams' words led to action and change. Mayor Bogaard, where will your words lead a very divided city? The people are waiting.

RALPH WALKER
MONROVIA

City Hall honors civil rights leaders

Parks study dedicated to local legend

By Janette Williams
STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — Civil rights icon Rosa Parks and Pasadena's own Ruby McKnight Williams, two African-American women whose quiet struggles for equality left a lasting imprint on their own communities and beyond, were honored in ceremonies at City Hall Wednesday.

A serigraph charcoal study of Parks by artist Jameel Rasheed, dedicated to the memory of Williams, who died in August at age 104, was unveiled in the Council Chamber before an audience of civic leaders, city officials and friends of the former NAACP president.

"What we are doing today is dedicated to two very strong, caring women, one who did most on the national level and one who did most on the local level," said Councilwoman Joyce Streater.

Williams was working to bring change to Pasadena and the West Coast at the same time Parks made history by refusing to give up her seat to a white man and move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, Streater said.

Parks' action touched off a bus boycott and launched the civil rights movement led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"It's very important; we need to know who put so much at risk — Rosa Parks was putting her life in jeopardy," Streater said. "Ruby McKnight Williams challenged the same ingrained racism in our community ... and the change benefited every citizen."

Rasheed's serigraph, in a limited edition of 220, is titled "Quiet Courage," and shows Parks looking out a bus window. The artist described it as his signature work.



Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

CITY COUNCILMAN Chris Holden, left, and Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard, center, congratulate artist Jameel Rasheed on his portrait of Rosa Parks.

"I had the feeling this was going to be a very important piece," Rasheed said before Wednesday's unveiling. "I had a feeling doing this piece that it would go into history."

Copies, which bear Parks' autograph, already hang in Boston City Hall, the Montgomery Transit Center in Alabama and the Rosa Parks Transit Center in Lynwood, the city which commissioned the piece.

Rasheed said there is also a possibility that the image will be used in a commemorative stamp.

"This gives us the opportunity to show the universality of the civil rights movement in the 1950s," Mayor Bill Bogaard said before the unveiling. "It's a wonderful opportunity to spotlight two civil rights pioneers."

Councilman Chris Holden, who was presented with one

of the serigraphs on leaving the mayor's office in April, said it "captured the essence" of the two women and was a testament to the human spirit that drove them to do the right thing.

"We all know there comes a time when we say no! Enough is enough. It's time to fight," Holden said. "Rosa Parks and Ruby McKnight Williams provided leadership in a way not many people are able to do."



Pasadena Heritage Oral History Project

Interview with:

Ruby McKnight Williams

by: Sharon E. Girdner

Pasadena, California

RUBY McKNIGHT WILLIAMS

PREFACE

Ruby McKnight Williams, a staunch advocate of equal rights for African Americans, paved the way for integration and civil rights in Pasadena. When she arrived in Pasadena in 1930 from Topeka, Kansas, she encountered a segregated city where blacks could find employment only in menial, low-paying positions and where discrimination was widespread in neighborhoods, schools, restaurants, and recreational facilities. With quiet determination and deep integrity, Ruby took action to make needed changes in Pasadena. Beginning with seeking better employment opportunities for African American women through a professional women's employment bureau, Ruby dedicated her life to promoting desegregation and improving race relations. She was active in the NAACP for more than fifty years, working with the organization and the community to advance equal rights for African Americans. She was in the forefront of school desegregation battles in Pasadena in the 1970s. Ruby served as Pasadena NAACP President for fifteen years (1958-1959, 1969-1983) and as a NAACP National Youth Advisor for several years.

Ruby's feisty spirit and strong principles emerge in the following interviews, conducted by Sharon Girdner for the Pasadena Oral History Project. She was interviewed at the age of 104 years in her home at 545 Westgate Street. Interviews took place on April 9, 1999 and May 6, 1999. Ruby McKnight Williams died a few months later on August 16, 1999

Transcription and editing of the tapes were done after her death. Editorial additions for reasons of clarification and verification are indicated by []. Newspaper clippings and photographs of Williams are located in Appendix A and B after the interview.



Ruby McKnight Williams, July 18, 1999
Photograph taken by Emina Darakjy.