

Civic Leader
Rosa Stewart

Rosa Stewart Rogers was a role model for thousands of young people. She was a talented public school teacher as well as an involved citizen and church member. Ms. Stewart was the daughter of the late Decatur and Eliza Spencer Rogers. Her father was a respected educator, who was principal of the Starkville Grade School Number 2 and later became the first principal of Oktibbeha County Training School, where Henderson 6th grade is located today. Mrs. Stewart's Family lived in the New Prospect Community south of Starkville. That is where she attended school and church at the community church (Prospect Methodist Church), later coming to Starkville to complete the 10th grade. Her final two years were completed at Rust College in Holly Springs where she also finished two years of college to earn a teaching certificate. She later returned to Rust College and received a B.S. degree.

Since she was the eldest child still living at home, she returned to Starkville to teach at Oktibbeha County Training School and help her mother. Mrs. Stewart taught second and third grade in her first year of teaching. In later years she taught seventh through twelfth grade English. She worked with students in their clubs and other extracurricular activities.

In 1928, Ms. Rosa Stewart married Thomas Stewart and they became parents of three children. Doris, her eldest daughter, owned and operated a day care program in Chicago, Il. Her son, Thomas James Stewart II, was a principal at a Chicago High School and her daughter Nawseed is an attorney in Jackson, Ms. Mrs. Stewarts husband, Thomas, died in 1943. Mrs. Stewart continued to teach until she retired in 1968, with more than 40 years in the classroom, 22 years of them as head of the English Department.

In 1967 Mrs. Stewart was selected as the Star teacher in the Mississippi Economic Council Program. After retirement, Mrs. Stewart became very involved in civic affairs in the Starkville community and her church (Griffin United Methodist). She helped to establish and worked with Day Care, Inc. Industrial Day Care and combined day care centers.

Mrs. Stewart was involved in such organizations as Oktibbeha County Cancer Society, March of Dimes, League of Women voters, Habitat for Humanity, The National Federation of Colored Women's Club where she was a charter member. She was a lifetime member and served in various offices and the NAACP.

In 1970 Mrs. Stewart was a candidate for City Alderwoman and reached a run off election in which she lost. Believing that one reason for her defeat was the city practice of electing alderman at large, she filed a suit in Federal Court entitled Stewart vs. Waller to require that the City of Starkville elect its alderman from designated wards. The case was successful and the opinion was that the City of Starkville elect its alderman from designated wards. The case was successful and the opinion that was handed down by the federal court mandated that election be held by Ward and was applied to 44 other Mississippi counties. In the next election Harold Williams, the first black alderman was elected.

Ms. Stewart was active in promoting better employment for blacks in the community. She was one of 100 residents to spend three days in jail after being arrested during a march in Starkville protesting hiring inequalities.

In 1978, as recognition of her many years as an educator and community servant, a middle school building (the 5th grade building) was named after her and she was inducted into the Starkville Education Hall of Fame. In 1981 the volunteer service award was presented to her by Gov. William Winters.

In 1982 she was the recipient of the George Evan Award. This award was presented for her outstanding civic service.

At the tender age of 80 years she was volunteering two days a week, three hours a day at the west side park (Martin Luther King Jr. Park) reading, playing games, music and providing recreation for pre-schoolers. In 1988 Mrs. Stewart served as Parade Grand Marshall in Starkville, Ms. At the age of 86, Mrs. Stewart was actively involved with the local Democratic Party and was a delegate at the state convention.

Mrs. Stewart received many numerous accolades from club organizations and the Mayor. Mrs. Rosa Stewart was a true example of a civic leader. Mrs. Stewart was born December 8, 1902 and died September 7, 2004. She was 101 years old.

References

Starkville Daily News, April 16, 1984

Starkville Daily News, September 27, 1988

Starkville Daily News, September 11, 2004

References by friends, family, and colleagues

Josephine Boyd

Mary Nell Mosley

Dr. Fenton Peters

Walter Williams