

# The Late Wilkie Clark, A Champion For Oppressed People in Randolph County



Perhaps one of the most visible, vocal and beloved citizens of the latter century was none other than the late Wilkie Clark, of Roanoke, Alabama. He was married to the late Mrs. Hattie Lee (Peters) Clark, a long-time educator, who's education career spanned nearly 40 years in both the Randolph County and Roanoke City School System.

Clark, a licensed funeral director and embalmer, established Clark Funeral Home, Roanoke, with his family in the late 1960s. Professionally, he provided funeral services to families all over the area until his tragic death in 1989.

But aside from being as astute entrepreneur, Clark was equally well known as the NAACP President in Randolph County, which gave him the platform through which to be forcefully and consistently vocalize the concerns of oppressed blacks all over the area and beyond.

He served as President of this his-

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toric organization for more than 40 years, earning the "Distinguished Service Award" for his many years of service to the NAACP, and recognition in the NAACP National Archives. However, aside from merely holding the title of NAACP President, he actively dramatized his deep concern for the conditions of blacks in his immediate community and beyond, becoming an action-oriented warrior for justice. He was a personable, christian man characterized by a deep sense of servanthood, and proved himself to be an effective black leader and confidant throughout Randolph County.

In addition to being a dedicated supporter of the NAACP, he served as the first President of the Alabama Democratic Conference (A.D.C.) Alabama's black political caucus, when it was first established in Randolph County.

Clark was directly involved with such local efforts as challenging the street and sanitation conditions (unpaved streets, and lack of sewerage in black neighborhoods), getting qualified black working on the polls on election day throughout Randolph County, getting the first two qualified black men hired as law enforcement officers in the City Of Roanoke, Alabama, challenging the racist practices within the Randolph County and Roanoke City School Systems, challenging the racist hiring practices in local government.

His final act on behalf of disenfranchised blacks in Randolph County was to serve as co-plaintiff in a class-action litigation against Randolph County, Alabama, to change its method of elections from "at-large," to "single-member districts," facilitating the election of Randolph County's first black county commissioner, Bishop Lathonia J. Wright, who still holds that position. Because of his concern over unfair, uneven discipline practices frequently directed toward black school children in integrated schools, he was the first black to run for a seat on the Randolph County Board of Education. Though defeated, he fought for district voting, which thus enabled

his daughter, Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson to be elected to the Randolph County Board of Education in 1988. She served as an elected member of the Board of Education for 18 years.

Today, in his memory and honor, his only offspring, Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson, her two children, Wilkie Sherard Frieson, and Je Lynn Mikele Frieson continue to operate the Clark Funeral Home, under the name Clark Memorial Funeral Service.

In 2005, Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson, detailed the life and works of Wilkie Clark by publishing his biography entitled "Chief Cook & Bottle-Washer, The Unconquerable Soul Of Wilkie Clark."

In his honor, in 2005, Clark-Frieson established the Wilkie Clark Memorial Foundation, which established and now publishes The People's Voice Weekly News, East Central Alabama's first black owned and operated Newspaper Publication. The goal of the Wilkie Clark Memorial Foundation is to continue the efforts of the late Wilkie Clark, to raise the social and economic status of black citizens throughout Randolph County, expanding its outreach across all the communities of East Central Alabama and West Central Georgia.

Individuals interested in joining the Wilkie Clark Memorial Foundation may contact Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson through The People's Voice Weekly News at 334-375-7160.

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