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Rev. Robert Graetz-Jeannie Graetz
Historic Marker Unveiling

Rev. Robert Graetz and Jeannie Graetz
1558 Dunbar Street
Montgomery, AL 36106
May 16, 2021
2:00 PM
Dr. Richard Bailey, Presiding
Mayor Steven L. Reed
Montgomery, Alabama

Cover: Rev. Robert Graetz and Jeannie Graetz (David Campbell/ASU)
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Rev. Robert Graetz and Jeannie Graetz attending Emancipation Celebration at Mount Zion AME Zion Church, January 1, 2018
Program

Call to Order .......................................................... Dr. Richard Bailey
*“Onward Christian Soldiers” ............................... Dr. Cordelia Anderson
                                           Accompanied by Dr. Kristofer Sanchack
Welcome ............................................................... Mayor Steven L. Reed
Reading of Letter.......................................................... Dr. Richard Bailey
From Martin Luther King III
Reflections
On behalf of Reverend Robert Graetz ...................... Rev. LaVaughn Wiggins
Graetz Family/Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. .............. Atty. Fred D. Gray
Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy .............................................. Rev. E. Baxter Morris**
E. D. Nixon .............................................................. Dr. Calvin McTier
Rosa M. Parks ............................................................ Dr. Farrell J. Duncombe
Jeannie Graetz ........................................................ Dr. Janice R. Franklin
Jeannie Graetz ........................................................ Mr. Jon Broadway
The Graetz Family ..................................................... Mr. Tim Lennox
As a Neighbor ............................................................ Atty. Julian L. McPhillips Jr.
The Graetz Family: Why Historic Markers Matter..... Mr. Scotty E. Kirkland
Recognition of Special Guests ............................... Dr. Richard Bailey
Historic Marker Unveiling ...................................... The Graetz Family
Remarks ................................................................. Dr. Richard Bailey
“My Country Tis of Thee” ................................. Dr. Cordelia Anderson
                                           Accompanied by Dr. Christopher Sanchack
“Onward Christian Soldiers”

1. Onward, Christian soldiers!
   Marching as to war,
   With the cross of Jesus
   Going on before.
   Christ, the royal Master,
   Leads against the foe;
   Forward into battle,
   See his banners go!

   [Chorus]
   Onward, Christian soldiers!
   Marching as to war,
   With the cross of Jesus
   Going on before.

2. At the sign of triumph
   Satan’s host doth flee;
   On, then, Christian soldiers,
   On to victory.
   Hell’s foundations quiver
   At the shout of praise;
   Brothers, lift your voices,
   Loud your anthems raise.

3. Like a mighty army
   Moves the Church of God;
   Brothers, we are treading
   Where the Saints have trod.
   We are not divided;
   All one body we:
   One in hope and doctrine,
   One in charity.

4. Onward, then, ye people;
   Join our happy throng.
   Blend with ours your voices
   In the triumph song:
   Glory, laud, and honor
   Unto Christ, the King.
   This through countless ages
   Men and angels sing.

*Martin Luther King Jr. King recalled years later: “The opening hymn was the old familiar ‘Onward Christian Soldiers,’ and when that mammoth audience stood to sing, the voices outside swelling the chorus in the church, there was a mighty ring like the glad echo of Heaven itself.”*

Origin of “Onward Christian Soldiers”

In Yorkshire, England, where Doctor Baring-Gould was stationed as curate of Horbury, it is the custom to observe Whitmonday as a day of festival for the school children. In 1865 his school was invited to march to a neighboring village, there to join the children of another school in the festival exercises. As he could not find a suitable hymn for the children to sing while marching from one village to another, he sat up late into the night to compose a hymn; and out of those midnight hours came the lines, “Onward, Christian soldiers;” to which the children marched toward their festival and to which hundreds of thousands of Christians have marched in the decades since it was written. It was published in the Church Times in 1865. The hymn with its stirring tune, written later by Sir Arthur Sullivan, makes an ideal processional.

Source: Carl Price, One Hundred and One Hymn Stories.
“My Country, Tis of Thee”

1. My country, 'tis of thee,
   Sweet land of liberty,
   Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountainside
   Let freedom ring!

2. My native country, thee,
   Land of the noble free,
   Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills.
My heart with rapture thrills
   Like that above.

3. Let music swell the breeze
   And ring from all the trees
   Sweet freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake;
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
   The sound prolong.

4. Our fathers' God, to thee,
   Author of liberty,
   To thee we sing;
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light.
Protect us by thy might,
   Great God, our King!

Origin of “My Country Tis of Thee”
(National Hymn of the United States)

“My Country ‘Tis of Thee” (also known as “America”) was the lyrical result of Samuel F. Smith’s drive to create a national hymn for the United States. A native of Boston, Smith (1808–1895) wrote the now-classic anthem in about thirty minutes on a rainy day in 1832, while a student at Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts. The first three verses encourage and invoke national pride, while the last verse was specifically reserved as a petition to God for His continued favor and protection of the United States of America. “My Country Tis of Thee” was first performed on July 4, 1832 at the Park Street Church in Boston.

Smith was also a Baptist minister, author, and journalist.
Program Participants

Rev. LaVaughn Wiggins is a native of Mobile, Alabama. LaVaughn Wiggins received the BS and MDiv from Concordia College of Fort Wayne, Indiana. He has served as pastor of United Evangelical Lutheran Church since July 2016.

Dr. Kristofer Sanchack is a professor of music at Alabama State University.

Dr. Cordelia Anderson is a professor of music at Alabama State University.

Attty. Fred D. Gray has represented countless civil rights litigants since March 1955. He is a living legend and a national treasure.

Rev. E. Baxter Morris is a native of Anniston and served as the pastor of First Baptist Church for several decades. He cherished church and local history.

**In deep respect to Reverend Morris, who died May 2, 2021, we decided to leave his name in the program.

Dr. Calvin McTier is the pastor of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church and a member of the Edgar D. Nixon Sr. Foundation.

Dr. Farrell J. Duncombe is the current pastor of First Congregational Christian Church, United Church of Christ. He is a former pastor of St. Paul AME Church and once sat in Rosa M. Parks' Sunday School class. He remembers her well.

Dr. Janice R. Franklin is the dean of Library and Learning Resources at Alabama State University and a recent recipient of the Ann Barnett Service Award for her exemplary contribution to librarianship and professional education. She also heads the university’s National Center for the Study of Civil Rights & African American Culture.

Jon Broadway met Jeannie Graetz through their association with One Montgomery, one of the city’s foremost biracial organizations.

Tim Lennox has been one of the most visible and trusting fixtures in television broadcasting in the area for decades. He is a personal friend of the Graetz family.

Atty. Julian L. McPhillips Jr. personifies the best in community advocacy. Rev. Fred Lee Shuttlesworth visited his home for prayer once when he was ill.

Scotty E. Kirkland works from behind the scene at the Alabama Department of Archives and History to ensure the factual accuracy of our cherished historic markers. He is a true asset to the state.
April 6, 2021

Dr. Richard Bailey, Sr.
P. O. Box 230144
Montgomery, AL 36123

To the Rev. Robert and Jeannie Graetz Historic Marker Unveiling:

Although circumstances make it impossible for us to join you in person, on behalf of my wife and partner, Arndrea Waters King, my daughter, Yolanda Renee King and myself, I write to you to express our warmest greetings to everyone gathered for the unveiling of the historic marker honoring the Reverend Robert Graetz and his wife and partner, Jeannie Graetz.

We hold Rev. and Mrs. Graetz in the highest esteem for their courageous and selfless leadership in support of the Montgomery Bus protest of 1955-1956 and the continuing work of my parents, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. At a time when very few white citizens of Montgomery supported the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Graetz family chose instead to answer the call of history and uphold the highest values of their faith to take a valiant stand for racial equality and interracial brother and sisterhood.

Rev. and Mrs. Graetz did not merely lend their respected names to this historic cause; instead, they served it as active participants, despite threats and the antagonism of many white citizens, who did not share their deeply-felt commitment to racial equality and human rights. Rev. Graetz served as secretary for the Montgomery Improvement Association and the Graetz family suffered multiple bombings of their home. But never did they back away from their heartfelt commitment to racial justice and the Montgomery bus protest.

Our family will forever remain grateful and deeply-inspired by the courageous leadership of Reverend Robert and Jeannie Graetz during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, just as my father and mother valued their friendship and support with the highest admiration.

This historic marker honoring Reverend and Mrs. Graetz will provide a potent reminder to future generations of our brave white brothers and sisters in Montgomery and their names will be forever emblazoned among the pioneers of the Beloved Community of my father’s great dream for our nation and world. And as we go forward into the uncertain future, the names of Robert and Jeannie Graetz will stand as a testament of hope for greater interracial understanding, goodwill and brotherhood and sisterhood.

In solidarity,

Martin Luther King III

Martin Luther King III · 1984 Howell Mill Road, NW · Suite 250613 · Atlanta, GA · 30325
May 16, 2021

Greetings:

On behalf of Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church Officers and Members, we salute the Honorable Graetz Family, on this historic well-deserved marker dedication. Saint Paul is the home church of Mrs. Rosa Parks, the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement and personal friend of the Graetz family. During the 3rd Annual Celebration of Rosa Parks Day in Alabama, Saint Paul proudly honored The Reverend Robert and Mrs. Jeannie Graetz for their determined efforts in “Dismantling Systemic Racism.” Their courageous acts during the Civil Rights Movement not only challenged the unjust state of affairs of the 1950’s, but their immense sacrifice signified Mississippi John Hurt’s greatest hit, “Just like a tree that’s planted by the water, I shall not be moved.”

Mrs. Rosa Parks referred to St. Paul as her “special living room.” This expression suggests that St. Paul and her faith in God was a place of refuge for her. Therefore, while under constant threat, documented home bombings, and perhaps social isolation from white clergy in the south, it is easy to conclude that the strength of Rev. Graetz and his family was fortified through his service: pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, one of the spiritual leaders during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and driving blacks to work while encouraging them to not ride the bus. These efforts combined with their faith, singing spirituals and trust in an Almighty God gave them the resolve and the resiliency.

Mrs. Rosa Parks, Rev. and Mrs. Graetz were not only neighbors that had an unquestionable bond; it is confirmed that Rosa Parks facilitated the Youth Council NAACP meeting in the Graetz home; attended the Highlander Folk School for social justice training together in Tennessee, in addition to countless Montgomery Improvement Association meetings that undergirded the 382-day Montgomery Bus Boycott. We are indebted to the Graetz family for their immense sacrifice in making this world a better place. May their contributions forever be etched in the annals of history!

Agnes M. Lover
Rev. Dr. Agnes M. Lover, Lead Pastor

The Mission of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church is to ensure access to holistic (spiritual, social, and educational) ministries for the empowerment of the community and to preserve the legacy of Mrs. Rosa Parks.

Rev. Dr. Cathay Bruce, Youth Ministry | Rev. Pamela Higgins, New Members Ministry | Rev. Cassie Jackson, Prayer Warrior | Rev. Bill Owens, Evangelism Ministry
March 26, 2021

Dear Dr. Bailey,

Thank you for the invitation to attend the honor ceremony for the late Rev. Robert and Jeannie Graetz. I will be delighted to share this moment with you and others. I not only knew him on a personal level, we were blessed on four occasions for him to speak in our pulpit both at 903 South Holt Street and 1870 South Court Street.

Please share with me any additional information I may need, but count me in!

Sincerely,

Rev. Willie D. McClung, Ph.D., Senior Pastor

Service in the Field Or Sacrifice In The Temple
VIA U.S. Mail Only
Dr. Richard Bailey, Sr.
P.O. Box 230144
Montgomery, Alabama 36123

Dear Richard:

Thank you for your kind letter of February 24, 2021.

Of course, I would be honored to be at the unveiling of an historic marker honoring the Graetz, along if possible, with my wife Leslie. As you must know, our properties bordered on each other’s, and we were frequently in each other’s homes, and with Leslie especially helping them regularly with personal needs, and I contributed to many of their civil rights causes.

They are forever our heroes.

Thank you so much, Richard, for including us. I enclosed a copy of the BOOM! Magazine article about us with the Graetz pictured.

Sincerely,

Julian and Leslie McPhillips

JLMcPhi/cjim
x.c. Leslie McPhillips
Robert S. Graetz (born May 16, 1928) is a Lutheran clergyman who, as the white pastor of a black congregation in Montgomery, Alabama, openly supported the Montgomery bus boycott, a landmark event of the civil rights movement. Graetz’s first full-time job as pastor was to a black congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church, in Montgomery. He began working there in 1955, the year of the Montgomery bus boycott. A personal friend of Rosa Parks, Graetz became secretary of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization founded to organize and support the boycott. Graetz’s support of the movement included appearing at meetings led by Martin Luther King Jr. For his support of the boycott, Graetz and his family were ostracized by other whites and suffered several episodes of harassment, including tire slashings,[4] arrest,[5] and bombings. Bombs were planted at his home on three occasions; the largest did not explode. The Graetzes are actively involved in various civic activities including the diversity group One Montgomery and the League of Women Voters. Each year they host the annual Graetz Symposium at the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University. (Wikipedia)
Celebration of
Montgomery Bus Boycott
Civil Rights Legends

Gifts of Giants

Attorney Fred Gray
Reverend Robert & Jean E. Graetz

Attorney Fred Gray
Reverend Robert & Jean E. Graetz

Guest Speaker: Dick Gregory
Activist, Critic, Writer,
Entrepreneur and Comedian

Thursday, December 12, 2013 | 6:30p.m.
Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa
Arise, Go Toward the South: Robert Graetz and His Stirring Times

Robert S. Graetz, Jr., was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia, a fifth generation male to bear the name since Gottlob Wilhelm Robert Graetz came to the United States in 1844. Graetz is also the fourth bearer of the name to become a Lutheran minister.

The childhood of Robert Graetz did not present a viable black presence. Indeed, as he entered Capital University, a Lutheran college in Columbus, Ohio, a watershed occurred when this Social Science major decided to concentrate in sociology and signed up for a course from Dr. Karl Hertz, who allowed him to write on a subject of his choosing. Graetz learned from some of his close Jewish friends in high school that some major colleges had Jewish quotas. His research revealed that African Americans were denied admission to American colleges. For the title of his research paper, he borrowed phrasingology from Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, “The die is cast.” He titled his paper, “The Cast is Dyed—Black.” Graetz believed the die had been cast in his personal life. He knew he had crossed his personal Rubicon and could not call retreat. His new concern propelled him to take three more courses from Dr. Hertz, calling him the most difficult “professor he had studied under, and probably the very best.”

On the strength of his new discovery, Graetz organized the Capital University Race Relations Club in 1948 and began attending the Columbus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At one of the meetings, he met Walter White, national head of the organization. As the only white person in the audience one night, Graetz took special note when White spoke of the increasing number of white persons who were joining the movement.

Robert Graetz also had the double pleasure of meeting Jean Ellis at Capital University. Not only did he succumb to the love of his life, he also met someone who shared his love for God and for social justice. Not easy picking, Jean Ellis had a mind of her own and a reputation to match. Robert Graetz had learned from a friend who had dated her not to attempt a kiss on the first date. Not deterred, Robert Graetz not only tried on their initial date, but he succeeded. Then on Sunday, June 10, 1951, the two became one before family and friends in the bride's hometown of East Springfield, Pennsylvania.

The young couple arrived in Montgomery in June 1955. As Bob Graetz settled in as the first white pastor of the all-black Trinity Lutheran Church, he learned to refer to the event from 1861 to 1865 as the War between the States, not the Civil War. Such orientation was just the beginning, as he came to view segregation throughout Montgomery society. He found it in the movie theaters, doctor’s offices, neighborhoods, schools, libraries, and parks everywhere.

Early on, a member of his congregation who operated a barber shop in his back yard was giving him a haircut when a white vendor stopped by. The barber tried unsuccessfully to hide the face of his customer. Night time visitors expressed their displeasure with a black man cutting the hair of a white customer.

In June 1955 Reverend Graetz met a seamstress named Rosa Parks, who used his church for NAACP Youth Council meetings. Parks became his best friend in Montgomery outside of his congregation. Bill Griffin, a fellow Lutheran pastor in Montgomery and an African American, related that someone had been arrested on the city bus and a boycott was being planned but knew little more. Graetz telephoned her on Saturday,
December 3, and said, “I keep hearing that someone has been arrested on the bus and there's going to be a boycott. Is that true? Who was it?” Parks replied, “It's true. It was me, Pastor Graetz. I was arrested.” A shocked Reverend Graetz rushed over to her home for details.

That Sunday morning Graetz preached a Christian analysis of Parks' arrest and announced to his congregation that he and his family would observe the boycott. On Monday he attended the 9 AM trial of Parks, where he sat reluctantly in the white section. That evening, with the assistance of church member Robert Dandridge, who led the way through the crowd, saying “This is my pastor, let us through,” Graetz found himself the only white person—except for news people and camera crew—inside the Holt Street Baptist Church, where they assembled in the basement.

After he joined the board of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Graetz remembers Dr. King saying that “If you are not ready to sacrifice your life for this cause, you have no business being on this board.” Graetz firmly believed he would be singled out for punishment. (He did have a long wait). When vandals struck his car in January 1956, they slashed the front tires from the inside so the cuts would go unnoticed but the tires would blow out from traveling at a high speed. Other times sugar was placed in the gas tank of his automobile. Graetz was also followed as he travelled by car. He stopped using the same route in succession. Graetz always feared for his safety and the safety of his family. Because of the volume of threatening anonymous letters that arrived, Graetz began to write letters with secret messages on the reverse side of postage stamps.

His home was bombed three times, with the last bomb not exploding. No one was home on August 25, 1956 as two or three sticks of dynamite landed 43 feet in front of the porch. The 3:00 AM explosion damaged the front door and some windows. Mayor W.A. “Tacky” Gayle accused the Graetzes of leaving home long enough for the MIA to plant the bomb as a publicity stunt. The explosion of January 10, 1957 caused some damage. Graetz heard other explosions minutes later and learned that four churches and one other home had been bombed, with his home being the first at 2:00 AM. The message was clear - get Graetz first. Bomb experts also found in the driveway 11 sticks of unexploded dynamite and a container of TNT, enough to have destroyed the entire neighborhood. The fuse had been lit, but it had gone out.”

In 1958 Graetz returned to Columbus to assume the pastorate of the St. Phillips Lutheran Church. He later participated in the March on Washington and returned to Montgomery for the last leg of the Selma to Montgomery March.


Back in 1955, when Graetz learned that he was headed to Montgomery, he placed on his stationary, “Arise, Go toward the South,” phraseology that was based on scripture. Montgomery became a better place because he came south in 1955 and has become an even better place since his return in the fall of 2005 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the bus boycott.

Richard Bailey, Montgomery, Alabama
Never Alone: The Legacy of Jean “Jeannie” E. Graetz

Jeannie Ellis Graetz was born in the small Pennsylvania town of East Springfield (population, 1,477); yet, in 2013 she stands prominently alongside the likes of such historical giants as Coretta Scott King and others because of her commitment to civil rights.

Jeannie Ellis grew up on a farm with four sisters and no brothers; consequently, she was expected to remain on the farm after graduation from high school to help out. Having a mind of her own, she worked for two years at the General Electric plant nearby in Erie (with the secret aim of going to college). Having an insatiable curiosity about different cultures—something she gained from being an avid reader—Jeannie Ellis invited one of her co-workers to meet her parents. The African American female and the Ellis parents were equally unprepared for the unprecedented encounter. Jeannie Ellis was truly the Eleanor Roosevelt of her day.

The single-minded Jeannie Ellis enrolled at Capital University in September 1949. There, she met an equally confident upper classman named Robert Graetz. Their first date and first kiss came on Saturday, February 12, 1950. He courted her acquaintance assiduously, and the relationship was consummated in East Springfield in June 1951. With this marriage, social justice had met social commitment. They would be inseparable thereafter, and the world around them never would be the same.

They became a praying couple, and it continues to show. Their propensity for prayer enabled them to withstand the bombing weather in Montgomery, Alabama. Pastor Graetz had promised Lutheran officials in Columbus that he would not start any trouble in Montgomery, and he kept his promise. But trouble found him once he identified with the Montgomery Improvement Association and its bus protest. The family brought their children along when they came to Montgomery, and the number continued to increase after their arrival.

Events intensified with the progression of the bus protest. Jeannie Graetz received very rude treatment at the office of her pediatrician. And, she never visited a beautician while in the capital city. The parsonage at 1110 Rosa Parks Avenue (named Cleveland Avenue at the time) was bombed on August 25, 1956. The bomb landed 43 feet from the porch, causing little damage to the front door, windows, and some furniture. Luckily, no one was home. But the family was not so fortunate on January 10, 1957. Early that morning, while the family—including a nine-day-old child—was sleeping, a dynamite exploded and caused some damage to the parsonage. No one was harmed. Eleven sticks of dynamite attached to a can of TNT that failed to explode were found in the driveway. Bomb experts said the two could have destroyed the entire neighborhood.

In addition to her concern about bombings, Jeannie Graetz worried about threatening telephone calls. One such call asked, “I see your children out in the yard there. Are you sure they’re okay out there?” Such calls also made her fearful of taking out the trash. She didn’t feel safe outside at night. The Graetzes lived in constant fear.
Never Alone: The Legacy of Jean “Jeannie” E. Graetz

Bob and Jeannie Graetz have been called many names, some unfit for print. And, the couple has been the victims of just about every act of inhumanity known to humankind. Yet, their faith in God never has wavered. Jeannie Graetz was convinced they were never alone.

On Saturday, February 26, 2011, Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange presented the Robert Graetz with keys to the city for his work in racial equality and reconciliation. The Graetz Neighborhood Association also used the 2:00 PM ceremony to dedicate the Graetz Neighborhood to Bob and Jeannie Graetz with a marker at the Fairview Avenue and West Jeff Davis Avenue intersections of Edgar D. Nixon Avenue.

Along the way Jeannie Graetz has co-authored many books with her husband, although her name does not appear on the cover. Such strategy is consistent with their view of teamwork. Because of her interest in literacy, the E. D. Nixon Elementary School in Montgomery surprised her by naming a literacy program in her honor on May 13, 2013.

Richard Bailey, Montgomery, Alabama
“Rosa Parks’ letter about KKK Bought By Family Bombed”

The handwritten letter by civil rights icon Rosa Parks about how the Ku Klux Klan bombed a neighbor’s home in 1957-Montgomery will shortly move back to the “City of Dreams.”

The letter will soon be transferred from the rarefied vault of an international auction house on Manhattan’s upper East Side to a climate-controlled enclosure in Alabama State University’s archives, all thanks to a beloved Montgomery family who lived in the very residence mentioned in the newly won Parks’ letter.

The family who purchased the 1957 letter last week from New York City’s Guernsey’s Auction for $9,375 is led by the Rev. Robert (Bob) and Jeannie Graetz, who are the very same couple whose family home on the corner of Mill Street and Cleveland Avenue in Montgomery was bombed by the KKK in the early morning hours of Jan. 10, 1957.

Parks’ letter is her firsthand account of the bombing that she vividly described in the letter purchased by the Graetz family. Both of the Graetzes are known as acclaimed pioneers in Alabama’s civil rights movement, and since retiring from the Lutheran clergy, both serve as advisers and consultants with ASU’s National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture.

“The house that Rosa Parks describes as bombed in the letter that we bought at auction was our own home, which was the parsonage of the Trinity Lutheran Church where my husband served as its minister and I served as its first lady,” said Jeannie Graetz.

The Parks’ letter won by the couple is an account of the second bombing of their home by the KKK. It was first bombed by the hate group on August 25, 1956. No one was seriously hurt then or in the subsequent 1957 bombing, which is the subject of Parks’ auction letter.

The Graetzes believe that they were on the Klan’s “hit-list” because they were among the only local white clergy who openly supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott that began after Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated Montgomery City Bus to a white passenger on December 1, 1955, which led to her arrest.
Parks’ arrest and what occurred because of it is called by historians as the seminal birth of the modern civil rights movement in America.

“We raised the ire of the local Klan as soon as we moved to Montgomery because we are a white couple, and my husband was the minister of an all-black Lutheran congregation. We also chose to live among our flock, and then we publicly supported the desegregation of Montgomery’s buses beginning in 1955. Because of those reasons, we were marked targets,” she said.

**Family Purchases Letter**

Rev. Bob Graetz said that a friend told the couple about the handwritten Parks’ letter a few weeks ago, and that is when his family had the “eureka” moment to purchase it, bring it back home to Montgomery and give it to Alabama State University’s archives. “We thought that the account of the KKK bombing of our house by Rosa Parks should come back home to Montgomery, and where better to house it than our beloved Alabama State University,” said Bob Graetz. “My wife and all seven of our children chipped in to help us purchase this piece of history and it has been a joy and a blessing to all of us to soon bring this back home,” said the 90-year-old civil rights foot soldier.

**Bombing Memories**

*Rev. Graetz with Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Montgomery, circa 1955. (File Photos)*
Jeannie Graetz said that when the KKK’s dynamite bomb went off, the entire family was home, which included her husband, her husband’s mother and their four young children – the youngest child inside the bombed home was their nine-day-old infant.

“When the bomb detonated at 2 a.m., it blew our roof completely off of the home, as well as all of the doors; it shattered every one of the windows and did considerable other damage to the rest of our house,” Jeannie Graetz said. “Our neighbors included Mr. and Mrs. Parks who lived across the street, and they were our close friends. After the bombing, they helped us clean and pick up. It was a miracle that no one was killed or severely injured.”

Jeannie Graetz remembered that many other locations were also bombed in Montgomery on that same evening.

“The same night that our home was bombed, four black churches were also bombed by the KKK in Montgomery, as well as the home of Rev. Ralph and Juanita Abernathy. Several men were arrested by law enforcement for these bombings and placed on trial, but the all-white local juries of that era found them all innocent,” she said with a sigh.

**Belongs At ASU**

Both Bob and Jeannie Graetz said that they both felt from the beginning that the Parks’ letter belonged at Alabama State University because of its long and historic association with Parks, who attended school on campus, as did so many other civil rights movement leaders, including the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, attorney Fred Gray, Jo Ann Robinson, Selma’s F.D. Reese, Thelma Glass, Birmingham’s Fred Shuttlesworth and so many more.

“Bob and I just love ASU, it is a part of us and its employees and students are just like our family,” Jeannie Graetz said.

**“A Wonderful Story”**

The president of New York’s Guernsey’s Auctions Arlan Ettinger said that the account of the Graetz family purchasing the Parks’ letter is a wonderful story.

“As the president of an internally acclaimed auction house, we’ve presided over many unique and meaningful auctions from the Titanic relics to Princess Diana’s jewelry … but this story is an extremely wonderful story,” Ettinger said.

“When I heard about the Graetz family’s full-circle story concerning the Rosa Parks’ letter, I thought how wonderful and fabulous it was for this most meaningful thing to occur at our auction house. What’s not to love about this occurrence?” Ettinger said.
‘All Of God’s Children’

The dean at ASU who oversees the University’s archives is Dr. Janice Franklin. She said that the University is gratified that the Graetz family pooled their resources and purchased this rare civil rights artifact for ASU.

She said that the Parks’ letter belongs in Montgomery and specifically at Alabama State University because of the University’s close association with the civil rights movement. “We who work at Alabama State University’s archives are overjoyed because this will allow us to preserve and share this important document with the public and scholars alike,” Franklin said.

She said that it is a rare find that speaks to the struggles and to the suffering that the Graetz family endured, as did so many others who stood up against hatred, segregation and the evils of Jim Crow and KKK injustice.

“Thank God for Rev. and Mrs. Graetz and this letter written by Mrs. Parks, which attests to all that the Graetz family went through so that freedom and equality could be enjoyed by all of God’s children, despite the color of their skin,” Franklin added.

Emancipation Association of Montgomery
Presents Its 155th Annual
Emancipation Proclamation Celebration
(1866-2021)

The Honorable J C Love III, Judge
Probate Court of Montgomery County, Alabama
Montgomery, Alabama
Keynote Speaker

Friday, January 1, 2021
10:00 AM

Theme:
“Tell Them We Are Rising
Our Cause is Just; Unity as a Must, the Struggle Continues”

Bryant Missionary Baptist Church
3645 Norman Bridge Road
Montgomery, AL 36111

Rev. Ronald Moncrief, Host Pastor
Dr. Richard Bailey Sr., President, Presiding
Emancipation Association Memorial Hall of Fame

Members

Lawrence A. Myers
John Louis Thomas
Cora L. McHaney
Elizabeth M.
Dr. Gwendolyn

Rev. Robert Graetz
Jeanie Graetz
Rev. Frank R. Johnson
Mr. David Calloway
Correata Scott King

Fervid supporter.
Civil Rights Advocate
Avid supporter,
Teacher, Counselor,
Pastor, Hall Street
Ardent supporter,
President

Friends
In Memoriam

Rev. Robert Graetz
Emancipation Association of Montgomery
Presents Its Sesquicentennial
EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION CELEBRATION

Rev. Thomas Earl Jordan, Pastor
Lilly Baptist Church
Guest Speaker

Tuesday, 1 January 2013
10:00 A.M.

Theme:
"Moving Forward in Unity with a Vision and a Purpose
Our Cause is Just; Unity is a Must, the Struggle Continues"

Hutchinson Missionary Baptist Church
860 Grove Street
Montgomery, AL

Dr. G. W. C. Richardson, Pastor
Dr. Richard Bailey. President Presiding
Program Participants

Rev. Andrew E. Dawkins is a retired AME minister and chaplain. His background has focused on radio broadcasting and contractual government service. He has also been a departmental supervisor. He continues to volunteer and to remain active in the community.

Rev. J. J. Fountain was born in Lowndes County to the late Mr. and Mrs. Willie Robert Fountain in 1940. He accepted his call into the ministry in 1961 and pastored Disciples of Christ for the next 25 years. He came to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Faith in 1986 and was ordained and received under the Right Reverend Cecil Bishop. He has pastored such churches as Bezzell Springs, Oak Street, Troy Chapel, and Weeping Mary AME Zion Churches. He is married to Mary Anna Flowers Fountain, and they are the parents of nine children.

Mary E. Gaines has excelled in several areas. A graduate of the University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa, the Loop College, and Midwestern Broadcasting School of Chicago, she has worked for the Department of Justice, the United States Forest Service as a public affairs staff officer. She has also been a producer and anchor for Alabama Public Television and a reporter for WBRC TV in Birmingham and WCBTV in Mississippi. Her work in radio has included WBMX in Chicago, WTUG in Tuscaloosa, and WXVI in Montgomery.

Lutheranism has served as the cornerstone for the faith of Rev. Robert S. Graetz. His faith sustains him well while he was a minister at the Trinity Lutheran Church during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and while as he and his family survived the taunts and physical violence. This Ohio native and author today calls Montgomery home.

Cannon Hyche is a junior at Booker T. Washington (BTW) Magnet High School. He is a lead guitarist in the Show Band Magnet and serves as president of the Board Game Club. Besides pursuing academic goals and serving as a student leader, Cannon participates in BTW's Theatre and Musical Theatre productions. He has been featured in The Crucible (John Proctor) and Children of Eden (Ham). Cannon is also committed to service and to making a difference in the lives of others as a youth missionary. He visited Nicaragua as a mission worker during his sophomore year in high school, and he has utilized lessons learned and observations made to support humanitarian efforts in his school and community. Cannon has also served as a member of BTW's National History Honor Society.

Kenyona G.T. Blocker, the daughter of the late Elder Ken Blocker and Ingrid R. Blocker, is a junior at Robert E. Lee High School, where she is an outstanding student. Kenyona is currently a two-year member of the school's prestigious Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program and a "first chair" trumpet player for the "Marching Generals", Lee's signature marching band. Her other interest includes volleyball, track and field, and basketball.
The Montgomery Advertiser (Montgomery, AL)  
Jan. 14, 1956

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**The Graetz Story**

**Pastor Graetz Is Threatened; And Quickly Receives Clyde Sellers’ Protection; As Phone Gushes Praise, Abuse**  
*By Tom Johnson*

**The Rev. Robert S. Graetz** made the following story notes after a telephone call at 2:15 a.m. Tuesday.

“White man who seemed to be drunk demanded that I come and give him taxi service like what has been furnished to the dark complexioned people. Suggested we set up a car pool for white people (I) can save the taxe. Suggested to give name.

The Rev., containing the story of his ministry at a Negro Lutheran church on Cleveland Avenue appeared in general circulation a few hours later. Graetz was treated by the after-effect of a surprised, and in many cases angry, indignant, white citizenry.

And, in turn, was surprised by the number who called to express their support of his work. A few dropped by to speak to him in person.

As of late yesterday, Pastor Graetz had logged 90 telephone calls as direct result of his boycott activities becoming known.

Twelve whites and nine Negroes made friendly calls. Eight calls were of the unfriendly sort, four of them downright hostile.

At 3:15 p.m. Tuesday, a caller threatened that ‘something might happen,’ and then Graetz got “out of town by nightfall.” Two hours later, three other calls were received, the same person in quick succession.

**Clyde Sellers Comes Through**

**By That Time**, Graetz had informed the police and a couple of detectives were on the scene and rang the last time. Graetz quickly passed it on to one of the officers, who grammed and said: “I heard him all right.”

Some time later, Graetz received one of the “threat calls” since his troubles started. **Commissioner Clyde Sellers,** who had learned of the threats shortly after the young pastor called the police.

Almost immediately, Graetz says, Sellers told him: “You know I don’t agree with what you believe but I do believe that every man has the right to his own beliefs.”

Then Sellers, a White Citizen’s Council member, assured Graetz, the former NAACP organizer, that nothing would happen to him, that police would watch the pastorate all night to discourage any violence.

**Graetz Joins Investigation**

**The Two** had a lengthy discussion of the boycott issues, with Sellers expressing the opinion the “boycott has failed.” He also informed Graetz of incidents that led him to believe the nearly unanimous abstention of Negroes from riding buses was not entirely voluntary.

Graetz, “thoroughly surprised,” said he had heard of no instances where pitting Negroes were pressured, but he promised “to investigate.”

There was no indication that the police commissioner should make a friendly call.

**Negro Son-In-Law**

**NOT SO FRIENDLY** was the letter from a Union Springs “white man,” with the white underscored three times. It cryptically contains: “May you have for a son-in-law the blackest Negro that ever originated from the whips of Africa.”

A telephone call Tuesday evening: “Pastor, if I was you I wouldn’t call my pastor. You’re a co-good Son-of-a-bitch.”

An “old white lady” who said she was a member of an “old family and knew all the city officials” offered her Oldsmobile for use in the car pool.

A man from Manor County said there are “thousands of white people who are determined to right the wrongs that have been done.” He added that race relations are “upset” in Smokey, Ala.

Mutually Exclusive Roles

Editor, The Advertiser:

After reading Tom Johnson’s column in *The Advertiser*, in which the ambitious young minister of Lutheran faith is described as taking such an active part in the 90-year-old Civil War question of segregation of the races:

It is apparent that this young and well meaning minister is conscientious and feels he is doing the right thing. We need lots of young men like that and I have no objections to their feeling free to use their time as best they see fit.

For one so young to move into a strange section or into a new state and to immediately project himself into a heated controversy as age-old as the separation of races at the same time hiding behind the skirts of the ministry in order to defy the very law that grants him immunity, shows a disregard for both Christian principle and for established law which has as its purpose to guard the peace that comes from nowhere except through Christ the Prince of Peace.

Can one imagine the Master using such tactics to serve the Lord?

Pastor Graetz is either a Christian or a rabble-rouser. He cannot be both.

Montgomery

JOHN KELTON.

Another John Brown

Editor, The Advertiser:

I read the article written by Tom Johnson of *The Advertiser* staff describing the activities of Rev. Robert S. Graetz. While he was sent here to be the pastor of a Negro church on Cleveland Ave., it appears that he spends more time stirring up dissatisfaction among the Negroes than he spends in the pulpit.

I noticed that Graetz hails from Charleston, W. Va. After reading this article I just casually picked up a book from my encyclopedia, flipped it open and by some strange coincidence I read that in 1859, just 96 years ago, in Charleston, Va., another fanatic by the name of John Brown was hanged.

Montgomery

JAMES H. GREENE.
Graetz Denies Bomb Hoax

The white minister of a Negro church whose home was damaged by a dynamite blast early yesterday, charged his church as a "toolhouse" in calling the blast a "patriotic stunt." The Rev. Robert Graetz, 27, arrived in the city during the afternoon to find windows and a door shattered at his home, 311 Cleveland Ave., by the pineapple blast. Windows in two rooms at the home were also shattered, but nobody was hurt.

Mayor W. A. Garle said the latest bombing was a "ferocious" move, and that it was "the most serious thing that has happened in the city in recent months." The mayor called the explosion a "terrible" act of violence and said it would not be tolerated.

Graetz, who has served as the church's pastor since last January, said the church had been under fire for several months.

Off Red China Coast

Probe Shows Navy Plane Hit By Gunfire Before Sea Crash

ROANOKE, Va. — A U.S. Navy patrol boat hit by gunfire before it crashed in the Pacific Ocean last winter was hit by a Japanese fighter plane, a Navy pilot said yesterday.

The F-86 fighter plane, piloted by Lt. Cmdr. J. D. H. Brown, was shot down by a Japanese fighter plane over the Pacific Ocean last winter, killing the pilot.

Mayor Sees "Publicity Stunt"

A part of the crowd of curious which surrounded the house of the Rev. Robert Graetz, 311 Cleveland Ave., following a bombing early yesterday, damaged the windows and door of the house.

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GRAETZ SAYS BOYCOTTERS
DENIED AUTO INSURANCE

A "cat and mouse" game between Montgomery insurance men and drivers in the Negro bus boycott pool—a game which threatens the pool's operation—was reported yesterday by a white minister closely associated with the boycott.

The Rev. Robert Graetz, white pastor of the Negro Trinity Lutheran Church, said the "game" has been going since January, with insurance men repeatedly cancelling policies on vehicles used in the pool, and owners constantly seeking reinsurance from new sources.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, president of the pool sponsoring Montgomery Improvement Assn., declined comment. However, he indicated that he knew of the situation.

Rev. Graetz, at whose home a bomb was set off last month ago, while he and his family were away, said his own automobile insurance policy once was cancelled and that he had difficulty finding a firm which would issue him another policy.

Under the state's driver responsibility law, auto drivers must be insured for $11,000 to cover any injuries or damages growing from accidents, or be able to prove an equivalent cash responsibility.

The law becomes applicable in case of any accident. Lack of financial responsibility in case of an accident brings automatic cancellation of the driver's operating license, and leaves him open for such action as a jury might take in civil action.

"It's been a cat-and-mouse game virtually from the start," Graetz declared. However, he added, the "game" has been a factor of the pool to an extent which threatens its immediate closing.

"It's a matter of keeping cars in reserve," he said, "and when one is put out of commission by loss of insurance, putting into service another which is insured."

The white minister did not say whether the action by insurance men was organized. But, he declared, "I'd say that of the cars (See BOYCOTTERS, Page 2A)

QUESTION MARK
SHROUDS DRAFT
OF FRED GRAY

The question of whether Negro Alty. Fred D. Gray, legal spokesman for Negroes boycotting Montgomery's city buses, would report for induction into military service today was up in the air last night.

The local draft board said he would: National Selective Service Director Gen. Lewis B. Hershey said he would not; and Gray last night refused to say either way.

Although Montgomery's draft board had ordered Gray to report for military duty Sept. 17, Hershey postponed Gray's induction indefinitely.

Meanwhile, F. A. Miller, head of Montgomery's Local Draft Board 51, said board members would meet sometime this afternoon to discuss Hershey's action. It was rumoured that members of the local draft board might resign their posts in a mass protest to Hershey's decision.

Miller said a press conference would be held following the board's meeting.

Gray had been exempt from the draft with a classification as a practicing minister. The local board changed his draft status to 1-A after deciding that Gray did not now qualify. However, it later developed that he has accepted a full-time pastorate.

The local board has been requested on two occasions to review the case by the national board, but both times members reached the decision that Gray's classification should remain 1-A.

BOYCOTTERS

(Continued from Page 1)

on which policies are sought, perhaps five out of every 10 are accepted."

It is in this manner, Graetz said, that the pool has kept operating. He added that only properly insured automobiles are being used.

A member of one of Montgomery's larger insurance agencies said last night that the rumor of discriminatory treatment of car pool insurance had been floating around in local insurance circles for some time. "But so far as I know there's no basis for it," he said. "Certainly I've seen no evidence of it."

Jim Upchurch, president of the Montgomery Assn. of Fire and Casualty Insurance Agents, said "this is absolutely the first I have heard of it. It's absolutely ridiculous.

"I never heard of any plot and I never heard any other agent mention it. But the car pool is a taxi-type operation and taxis always have trouble getting insurance."

Upchurch said he did not know who was handling insurance on the car pool vehicles but he understood some of the local companies recently closed under state injunction might have been writing some of the business. The group Upchurch heads is composed of agents selling stock company policies.

An agent for mutual Insurance companies as well as stock companies, Terry Mastin, said "it's not true that anybody has ganged up on the car pool operators. "I haven't heard one word about it."
White Minister Of Negro Church Receives Threats

A young white minister of an All-Negro church here reported that he received another in a series of threatening telephone calls Tuesday night.

But the Rev. Robert Graetz described it as “nothing unusual” and added that he’d “rather not talk about it.”

Graetz, pastor of the Trinity Lutheran Church and at one time a volunteer driver in the boycott car pool, has been the target for numerous such calls in the past.

He reported to Det. Lt. George Owens that an anonymous caller telephoned to warn him to “get out of town or you won’t be alive tomorrow.”

Graetz said he hasn’t received “outright threats” on his life too frequently, but confirmed that he does get more than his share of “crank” telephone calls.

A crudely fashioned bomb was exploded in the front yard of his home several weeks ago, breaking the glass out of a picture window. The Rev. Greatz and his family were out of town at the time.
Buses

White Clerics In Report Flay Violence Here

While a victim of yesterday's bombings looked on, a group of white religious leaders issued a statement deploring a renewal of violence here.

The group of about 25 Protestant ministers and a Jewish Rabbi included the Rev. Robert Graetz, white pastor of a Negro church, whose home was one of the six buildings dynamited in a series of pre-dawn bombings here yesterday.

Nearly two hours in formulating their statement, the church group urged residents to maintain law and order. Segregation was not mentioned in the document.

Their statement follows:

"As a group of religious leaders of this community, we feel it our sacred duty to issue this statement to our people and to all the citizens of this community:

1. We call upon all citizens to join with us in an act of repentance for the violence done against the homes of some of our citizens, against houses of God, against peace, order and good will of our community.

2. Whatever our differences of opinion may be, we cannot remain silent and allow our community to lapse into the barbarity of terrorism and intimidation.

3. We call upon you to offer fervent thanks to Almighty God that none were injured in the bombings of Jan. 10, and to pray both publicly and privately that by His grace, we may be guided into the ways of righteousness and peace.

4. We call upon the God fearing people of Montgomery to highly resolve that violence must not be allowed to continue and that law and order must be maintained in our midst."
Six White Men Charged In Bombing Wave Here

The Montgomery Advertiser (Montgomery, AL)
Feb. 1, 1957
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Above, Robert and Jeannie Graetz accept the key to Montgomery from Mayor Todd Strange during the Graetz Neighborhood Association’s dedication ceremony of the Graetz Neighborhood on Saturday. More photos of event at montgomeryadvertiser.com

Photos by Lloyd Giffen Advertiser

Dedication service

TONGUE CAN WREAK VIOLENCE AS WELL

Words do matter

S

icks and stones may

break my bones, but

words can never hurt

me.” My mother taught me that.

When I was a young boy. And I

heard her, when I was a young boy.

Did not take long to discover

how truly hurtful words could

be. My teenage years encompassed

the Second World War. We were

expected to have our weapons, the

“Katana” and the “Japs,” and no good

word was too spoken about them.

When thousands of Japanese

Americans were interned in prison

camps, I heard not one word

about their wrongs.

Words were important. They

helped define, naming who were

the “we” and who were the “oth-

ers.”

Words are still important. That

is why the recent debates over the

use of certain words deserve our at-

tention. Some of these debates may

seem petty, but they are not.

That is all. They define who we are

and what our rules in society.

Example the “N word.” For

years a debate has been raging

within the African American com-

community about whether it is ever

acceptable for entertainers and oth-

ers to use public use of this most

hated of all offensive words. Many

think Mark Twain’s very effective use

of the word defies a society and an

time. The dispute centers on the

proper use of that recurring phrase

of Twain’s work, which removes the

N word.

I don’t understand the argu-

ment. Offering an altered version of

a writing does not erase the origi-

nal, nor does it prohibit readers

from using any version they prefer.

I have heard the argument that

changing words like changing the

Bible. The fact is that the Bible

has been re-illustrated dozens, possibly

hundreds of times. The words of

Scripture are those who want to hold

in check what they convey, which

are certainly allowed to be.

Another example was the use of

feminist words by political officials

who should have known better.

When the former governor of Alas-

ka used the phrase “blood chit,” she

must have been aware that those

words are universally understood

as a sign of harrow and threats and

vice versa. The decision in what words

they are to use? In the days of the move-

ment to the 1960s and 1970s, we

dealt with the daily experiences. We

suffered through them, because we

knew what they were like. The daily

struggle of a social structure that

was ending, after a time that was

neatly its conclusion. But the remain-

ants of that social structure have

remained themselves in that, and

that era has ended.

It is not possible that some of

what we have lived through with

expressions of hatred might be

implied in the language itself as

they carry out such violent acts as

shooting a Black woman. Did you

think that was going to be effective?

No, they were not common school-

yard bullying, which has, in more

times, become more intolerable than

it had in the suicide of the one who

was bullied.

When Dr. King shared his belief

in non-violent protest, his concept,

not in the first, the tongue and the

heart. We should not commit to

violent actions or words. Thoughts.

His entire work was about the

counterpointing relationship among

all peoples, which would lead us to

resist and affirm one another.

We may not understand each

other. We may not share the same

identities and ideals. We are all

human beings, even when we do not

like each other. But we can see

our common and our human rights

in our God created and God guided.

The Son, Robert Graetz

Granville: Visit and Dedication

in Montgomery during his last

hours. Bob and Mrs. Graetz have

returned to Montgomery and work

with the National Center for

American Culture at Alabama State

University.
Rosa Parks recalled at service

Civil rights leaders attend Bus Boycott event at historic church

REBECCA BURLO
MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER

Although civil rights attorney Fred Gray is no stranger to public speaking, Sunday's message at the historic United Evangelical Lutheran Church on Rosa L. Parks Avenue was an "emotional experience," as he recalled growing up on the west side of Montgomery, revisited his birth home, old haunts and talked about his good friend, Rosa Parks.

Sunday's event was one of the final activities to wrap up the 60th anniversary of the Bus Boycott commemoration, celebrated weekly in Montgomery to laud Parks and other civil rights leaders for their part in organizing and supporting the boycott during which black Montgomery residents refused to ride city buses for 381 days.

The boycott led to the city adopting an ordinance to allow black patrons to sit anywhere on city buses.

Both Gray and Reverend Robert Graetz have had their fair share of speeches in Montgomery and Central Alabama since the kickoff of the commemoration Dec. 1, as pivotal leaders in the fight against segregation, but Sunday was special for the pair. Gray grew up not far from the church and Graetz became its pastor in 1955, right as the boycott began.

Both men knew Parks, the woman whose image is largely associated with the boycott after she refused to move her seat to the back of a Montgomery bus for a white man.

At the time of the boycott, Parks lived in what is now called the Cleveland Apartments, right next door to United Evangelical Lutheran Church. The church too had changed its name from Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.

See Parks, Page 4A
Parks
Continued from Page 1A

Graetz’s parsonage, located next door to Trinity was bombed twice. One failed to detonate, the second exploded and destroyed most of the home. It was the 16th church to be attacked by the Klu Klux Klan because Graetz activity supported the boycott and black’s rights.

His strong support for the African-American community began in college.

“I was doing research on the discrimination against Jews and found out, to my dismay, there was a whole evil done against the African-American people and they were treated more harshly than any other group in this world. And I in my whiteness knew nothing about it,” Graetz said.

He was stunned and ashamed and made a vow to serve African-American communities and churches.

Graetz was offered a pastoral position at Trinity in 1955, under one condition. “Don’t start trouble,” Graetz said.

“And I have not broken that promise. We didn’t start the trouble, we joined the trouble,” Graetz said. “We’re here because we as a people are committed to something greater than any of us. We’re not doing this for ourselves, we’re doing this for the children.”

Rosa Parks, who, also held meetings of her NAACP Youth Council at Trinity, was there to help Graetz family clean the debris from the bomb.

She was met with Gray for daily lunch at his law office to talk about the issue of race, segregation and women like Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Smith, whose stands against bus drivers at that time went largely unnoticed.

“They knew it would happen again and Parks asked Gray what she should do, Gray said.

“Unlike what most media outlets at the time said, it didn’t just happen,” Gray said of the boycott. “There were many meetings and plans made between Rosa Parks’ arrest and the first meeting at Dexter Church that people don’t even know about.”

Gray rebutted the commonly known story, that painted Parks as a hard-working seamstress who simply was too tired to move from her seat. Although that was true, there was much more orchestration that went on behind the scenes, he said.

“But I don’t think Rosa Parks would think that she was an icon ... She did what she could and I know she would feel the same way,” Gray said. “She did what she could.”

Gray represented Parks in the famous case, City of Montgomery v. Rosa Parks and later Dr. Martin Luther King after he was arrested.

“She knew what needed to be done to end segregation on buses and to help young people,” Gray said. “She gave her life and dedication to help people.”
I have twice become nearly overcome with guilt about my youthful attitude to race relations. The first time, Congressman John Lewis had come to town for the dedication of an historic marker at the Greyhound Bus Station downtown location on South Court Street. Lewis was among the Freedom Riders who were beaten when a Greyhound bus carrying both African-Americans and whites rolled into Montgomery in 1961.

And the second time occurred a few years ago when the late Tommie Miller re-introduced me to The Rev. Robert Graetz and his wife Jeannie. It was then I learned of their astonishing involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Montgomery Improvement Association.

Pastor Graetz is a white Lutheran pastor. I am a Lutheran who somewhat prided herself on her lack of racial prejudice. How, I wondered, could I not have known the Graetz family and supported them in their efforts? How could I have been so totally oblivious to those who were struggling so?

Of course, I had not thought about the calendar. The Montgomery Bus Boycott began December 1, 1955. I did not move to Montgomery until mid-1964. I have subsequently learned that the Graetz family left Montgomery for a new pastorate in 1957, and the church they pastored changed its synodical affiliation and — I assume — its involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

How, I tortured myself, could I have been so blissfully unaware and unengaged in the upheaval that was ongoing in Montgomery at that time? The answer was pretty simple: I grew up in a time and place where “ignorance was bliss” … or perhaps worse!

An award-winning 1966 CBS Television documentary, “Sixteen in Webster Groves,” depicted a St. Louis suburb where parents shielded their children from all ugliness, in the hope that life would be better for their offspring than they had experienced themselves during the Great Depression. That, at least, was my take on what occurred. A 1996 report in a St. Louis publication saw it differently: “...what they chose to show after three months nestled amid the shaggy trees and century-old homes — was a Babitt-like conformity, rigid and overbearing parents, an insular and soulless class and a callous indifference to the minuscule number of “negroes” in the community.”
“The Graetz Neighborhood Dedication”

I didn’t grow up in Webster Groves. And my childhood home was right next door in the suburb of Kirkwood, Mo. Our public schools integrated peacefully in the fall of 1955, right on the heels of Brown vs. Board of Education. While they may well have occurred, I don’t ever recall reading or hearing about a civil rights demonstration in our area.

As a college freshman at Washington University, also in St. Louis, I had a friend from New York whose older sister was a Freedom Rider. But my friend spoke little of that. Her concerns were more mundane: making decent grades and gaining social acceptance.

She and I, were we guilty of anything, were shamefully self-absorbed and terribly like the adolescents of every generation since WWII. Not an excuse, for sure. But an explanation.

My coming to grips with the reality of both prejudice in my childhood community AND my developing a real heart for equal justice has occurred only slowly over the intervening years since early adulthood. I like to think that now — given the chance — I will stand with any oppressed group. Stand tall and loud. (Friends in the GLBT community, hold me accountable on that!)

So it was with immense joy that I attended last Saturday’s dedication of the Graetz Neighborhood entryway sign at the intersection of E.D. Nixon Avenue and West Fairview, just two blocks west of Midtown. Guest speaker and historian Dr. Richard Bailey rightly observed that we in attendance were witnessing another milestone in Montgomery race relations, that of a nearly 100% African-American neighborhood’s decision to name their community after their beloved white friends, Robert and Jeannie Graetz. Amazing — utterly amazing!

Hat’s off, Graetz Neighborhood, for honoring Dr. King’s vision for a time when people are judged “not by the color of their skin but on the content of their character.” And hat’s off, Montgomery. We’ve come a long, long way. And, yes, we still have a long, long way to go!


Sandra Nickel has been listing and selling residential real estate for over 29 years, most with an intense focus on Montgomery’s Midtown neighborhoods. Sandra serves on the Mid-Alabama Coalition for the Homeless, the Cloverdale Business Coalition, Historic Southview, the Volunteer and Information Center, Landmarks Foundation and her own neighborhood Garden District Preservation Association.
Church vigil protests law

By Brian Lyman

Nury Ballinas was born in Mexico but has lived in Alabama for 12 years. The state's new immigration law, if upheld in court, might require her to leave.

“We have a house in Mexico,” said Ballinas, a 15-year-old student at Wetumpka High School, following a vigil in protest of the law at Immanuel Presbyterian Church on Thursday. She is undocumented.

“I was born there, but I don’t remember anything about it.”

The 60 participants at the vigil prayed that Ballinas and other undocumented aliens would, in the words of a prayer read by retired pastor Andrew Dawkins, receive “protection from the evils of this law.”

The legislation, signed by Gov.

Robert Bentley on June 9, makes it a state crime to be an undocumented alien in Alabama and gives law enforcement the power to detain those they have “reasonable suspicion” of being in the country illegally while performing other duties.

The law’s supporters have said it is a necessity because of federal inaction on immigration enforcement. Civil rights groups, religious leaders and the U.S. Justice Department have sued to overturn the law.

Most provisions of the statute were scheduled to go into effect Thursday, but U.S. District Judge Sharon Blackburn issued a temporary injunction against the law Monday, saying she needed more time to consider specific requests.

The Rev. Elizabeth O'Neill, pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, speaks at a vigil held in protest of Alabama's immigration law on Thursday. BRIAN LYMAN/ADVERTISER

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Vigil

Continued from Page 18 for enjoining portions of it. A larger vigil protest against the law took place in Birmingham on Thursday evening.

Many of those at the vigil work with immigrant communities.

“People are so afraid to go out from their homes,” said Sister Janet Santilanes, who works for Hispanic Ministries for the Roman Catholic Church. “They’re afraid they’re going to lose everything.”

Participants read Scripture and selections from the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr.

The Rev. Bob Groat, a Lutheran minister who worked with King during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, read a selection of King quotations, including one from the late civil rights activist’s “Letter From a Birmingham Jail.”

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,” Groat read. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Groat said after the vigil that his opposition to the immigration statute was “one more phase of the civil rights movement.”

His wife Jean, who also attended the service, said they were there “to support people who are being discriminated against. It’s that simple.”

Religious leaders said they feared the law’s provisions against harboring undocumented aliens could criminalize religious gatherings and services involving the undocumented. Supporters of the law said that could only occur if there was a deliberate effort to shield the undocumented from the law, and Blackburn said during an injunction hearing last week she saw nothing in the law that did that. Attorney General Luther Strange, defending the law in court, said he saw nothing in it that abridged religious freedom.

But the Rev. Elizabeth O’Neill, pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian, said fear created by the statute was undermining the churches that provide.

“When people have needs, and every other door is closed, people come to church,” she said. “Now people are afraid to come to church.”
Civil rights giant dies

Former Montgomery minister helped organize Montgomery Bus Boycott

Brian Lyman
Montgomery Advertiser

The Rev. Robert Graetz, whose support of the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott made him a target of segregationists and sparked a career dedicated to social justice, died Sunday, his daughter Meta Ellis said. He was 92.

Graetz had been in hospice care.

Graetz, who ministered to the majority-black Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church, helped organize the early stages of the boycott and helped drive people to and from work.

Graetz was the only white clergyman to support the boycott, and like other participants in the boycott, the sworn and his family persisted in the face of harassment, terrorism, and death threats that extended to their preschool children. Vandals poured sugar in their gas tank; slashed their tires and sprayed acid over their car. White students on segregated school buses shouted “n—r lover” at Graetz and his wife, Jennie, as they walked the street.

The family home was bombed twice, and while aaces were made, no one was ever convicted. Graetz often became emotional remembering the bombings in later years.

“People often said we had coverage,” he said in 2008. “There were times when I was scared to death.”

Graetz received tributes from Gov. Kay Ivey and Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed, who praised him as a civil rights giant.

“He stood for what was right, not for what was popular, even if that meant the safety of him and his family was at risk,” a statement from Ivey said. “It is because of people like him that Montgomery and the entire state of Alabama have progressed from the vestiges of the past.”


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Graetz

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Breed posted a picture of himself with Robert and Jeanie Graetz, and told the late minister "practiced what he preached."

"Yes, Robert Graetz and his wife Jeanie stood against hate and put their lives in danger because of their alliance with whites in civil rights battles.

"Naturally I just learned," Graetz told the Advertiser in 1999, "because that's what Robert and Jeanie Graetz organized long before I was born because of the growing presence of whites in civil rights battles.

"It was a wonderful pastor," Eula Bell, a member of the church, told the Advertiser in 1999. "He was kind-hearted. I remember you didn't hear cry in the church. The children would stand at the door with him."

The church also sponsored meetings of the NAACP Youth Council, through which Graetz met Rosa Parks.

"When we met Rosa, we just fell in love with her," Graetz said in 2005. "She was such a great lady, and she was. She could really lead those kids and they responded.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Graetz had spent barely six months as the pastor Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church in 1955 when Black leaders, including Rosa Parks, announced their boycott of all buses in Montgomery following Parks' arrest on Dec. 1.

The Sunday after the arrest and first organizational meetings, Graetz encouraged his congregation to unite behind the protest.

"Let's try to make this boycott as effective as possible because it won't be any boycott if half of us ride the buses and half don't ride," Graetz told the congregation.

"If we're going to do it, let's make a good job of it.

With a full schedule that included preaching at churches in Clanton and Wetumpka, Graetz took an active role in leading the boycott, shuffling as many as 10 people a day between home and work.

As a member of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Graetz organized car pools and raised money to pay for the legal and administrative expenses of civil rights activists in northeastern Tennessee, where he got a call from a reporter asking for a comment about his home being burned.

It was the first news Graetz had about the attack, which tore the door off and shredded a window.

Far from providing support, city leaders went on the offensive. Mayor W.A. Gayle accused the Montgomery Improvement Association of setting off the bomb to boost interest in the boycott.

"We are inclined to wonder if out-of-state contributions to the boycott have been dropping off," he said. "Perhaps this is just a publicity stunt to build up interest of the Negroes in the camps.

Gayle called the mayor's comments "redhanded," and King rejected all of Gayle's premises.

"Since the mayor implies that Negroes perpetuated this deplorable act, it is both morally compelling and practically expedient for us to use the power of his office to bring the guilty parties to justice," King said.

The boycott ended in December after Montgomery's bus system was ordered desegregated. The attacks did not.

On Jan. 10, the Guertons, their children, including their 9-year-old son and the Rev. Graetz's mother were at home when a bomb exploded on their front lawn. Shortly afterward, a much larger bomb, consisting of 12 sticks of dynamite, was found, which could have killed the entire family had it gone off.

"The thought of tiny babies having bombs thrown at them in the middle of the night was just incredibly difficult to deal with," Graetz told The New York Times in 1988. "My mother, my poor mother, she had come down to help take care of the babies, and she was just devastated that these terrible people would just throw bombs at our babies.

The Guertons were one of several individuals targeted that evening. The Rev. Ralph Abernathy was also bombed, and some African-American church members were also targeted. Arrests took place, but no one was ever convicted.

After the boycott

In 1958, the family moved to minister at a church in Chicago, Illinois. Graetz worked in Ohio, Kentucky, California and Washington, D.C., where he worked as a lobbyist for marginalized individuals for 13 years.

Robert and Jeanie Graetz returned to Montgomery in 2005 for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, then moved to the city permanently in 2007. They worked for Alabama State University and held regular symposiums on civil rights issues.

The couple also wrote semi-regular columns for the Advertiser.

"What shall we done about the porkering on the people that have scattered through our nation, disproportionately African-Americans," Graetz wrote in 2005. "Our progress has been made in ensuring more satisfying and productive lives to those who are the most vulnerable in our society, we cannot fully resolve the problems that divide our various groups.

The couple remained politically active and outspoken, even as the Rev. Graetz entered hospice care in 2012.

This year, they opposed Alabama's House Bill 56, which criminalized undocumented immigrants' lives in the state. Graetz also condemned white nationalist violence at Charlottesville in 2017 and sharply criticized the old President Donald Trump's reaction to it.

"Now that there's no longer a culture of fear, even if it's the worst of times, we're setting a standard for all of us," he told The Montgomery Advertiser in 1994.

"It's not just a standard based on God. Now, instead what we see is television channels that are based on who can tell the most lies the most effectively."

Graetz was survived by his wife, seven children, 27 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

"Some time ago I read that the first requisite of a successful missionary is that he become color blind," Graetz told the Advertiser in 1994, near the start of the Bus Boycott. "I figured that the same was true of my work here. I know that I can't make every person I meet suffer. But I cannot minister to myself alone. My people also have others.

Contact Montgomery Advertiser

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‘Christian zeal’

Jeannie Graetz, who helped and publicly supported Montgomery Bus Boycott, dies at 90

Bria Lyman
Montgomery Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Jeannie Graetz, one of a handful of whites in Montgomery who publicly supported the 1955-56 Bus Boycott — and suffered threats and two bombings of her home — died Wednesday. She was 90 years-old.

Meta Ellis, Graetz’s daughter, said the cause of death was cancer. Graetz died nearly three months after her husband, the Rev. Robert Graetz, passed away.

The Graetzes were some of the very few whites in Montgomery to support the boycott. The Rev. Graetz, who pastored the majority-black Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church, was the only white clergyman in Montgomery to do so, and joined the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which organized the boycott.

The family endured the harassment other members of the Montgomery Improvement Association did. Segregationists poured sugar in their gas tanks and slashed the tires on their vehicles. The family home was bombed twice. The first time, in the summer of 1956,

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Rev. Robert Graetz and his wife, Jeannie Graetz, are shown in Montgomery on April 1, 2015.
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the family was away on a trip.
The second time — on Jan. 10, 1957 — the Graetzes were home with their four young children and the Rev. Graetz's mother; when the bomb went off.

"It's one of those things you try to forget," Graetz told the Advertiser in 2008. "Not a fun thing to happen at 2 in the morning with four babies and a mother-in-law there. To know there are people who hate you, that's not very nice to know."

Born Jean Ellis on Dec. 24, 1929, Graetz was raised on a farm in northwest Pennsylvania, the second of five daughters. The Rev. Graetz wrote in "A White Preacher's Memoir" that Jeanie's father, Marshall, openly wished for boys, but sent his daughters to do the chores. Jeanie maintained a trap line on their farm to catch animals and sell their hides for cash.

"We were his boys," she said. "We did every kind of work that a farm boy ever did."

Jeanie was also attracted to an early age to those who were different, the Rev. Graetz wrote. As a student at Capital University in Bethesda, Ohio, sheroomed with a blind student, helping her in her classes and developing a lifelong friendship with her. Jeanie Graetz later said that her interest in other people was an act of rebellion against the hypocrisy of the adult world, natural curiosity and an act of faith.

"Knowing how Jesus treated people, she says she had a 'so-called Christian zeal' to do the same," the Rev. Graetz wrote. "That 'zeal' has been apparent throughout her life, not sporadic."

Jeanie Ellis married the Rev. Graetz, a native of West Virginia, on June 3, 1955. They moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where Graetz would serve as pastor of Trinity Lutheran.

The Graetzes chose to live in the Trinity Lutheran parsonage, near their predominantly Black congregation. The family, which knew little of the unwritten rules and expectations of the Jim Crow South, was instantly shunned by most of the white community. While attending movies, the Graetzes insisted on sitting in the Black section in the balcony. Fearful that such actions would lead to riots, theater owners rushed them into their seats and let them watch films for free.

"The Graetzes almost never got to laugh at such absurdities," historian Taylor Branch wrote in "Parting the Waters," the first book in his trilogy on the civil rights movement. "There was too much tension. Besides, the daily ostracism caused too much hurt within the family for its success to be funny."

There was also tension with some members of the Trinity Lutheran congregation, a few of whom said out loud that they did not need a white man to tell them how to live," Branch wrote. But the Graetzes did form friendships with a number of people in the congregation, including Ross Parks, who lived across the street from the family. The Rev. Graetz also befriended the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., then a pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

The Sunday after Parks was arrested for refusing to give up his seat on a Montgomery bus on Dec. 1, 1955, the Rev. Graetz preached a sermon calling on his congregation to support the boycott, and saying his family would do the same.

"Harassment began almost instantly. A nurse at the office of Jeanie Graetz's obstetrician berated her family's stand, and "seemed unnecessarily rough and careless in her preliminary examinations of Jeanie," the Rev. Graetz wrote. The Graetzes had sugar poured into their gas tank, and slashed their tires. Students at the segregated schools shouted "n— lover" at the Graetzes as they walked down the street.

"Someone would write that they've seen our kids out playing in the yard and they had a gun there and they could just shoot them," Jeanie Graetz told the Advertiser in 2005. "Things like that, they scared you to death."

In August 1956, the Graetzes attended a training at the Highlander School in Tennessee. While there, the Rev. Graetz got a call from an Advertiser reporter asking him for comment about their home being bombed. When they returned home, a Montgomery police lieutenant spoke so harshly to the Graetzes that their 2-year-old son shouted: "Go away, you had policemen." (Montgomery Mayor W.A. Gayle openly speculated that the Graetzes had planted the bomb themselves.)

The Graetzes installed lighting around their house after the bombing and tried to hire guards — one of whom frequently visited bars — but did not stint in their support of the boycott. It ended in December 1956, when discrimination on Montgomery's bus lines was ruled unconstitutional.

On Jan. 10, 1957, the Graetzes, along with their young children and the Rev. Graetz's mother were at home when a bomb exploded on their front lawn. The bomb blew out the windows and doors on the house and scattered plaster and glass on the floor. (Parks helped the Graetzes clean up the damage.) A second bomb was discovered which, had it gone off, would have killed the family.

"I had a hard time forgiving them for that," Jeanie Graetz said in 2003. "How could someone bomb a house with babies in it? That bomb was supposed to kill us."

When the Graetzes' home was bombed in 1957, Parks came across the road and helped sweep up the damage. The Graetzes left Montgomery in 1958 to go to a predominantly Black church in Ohio. The Rev. Graetz later worked as a lobbyist for marginalized groups. Robert and Jeanie returned to Montgomery in 2007, where they worked for Alabama State University and held symposiums on civil rights issues. The couple was frequently seen at social justice gatherings and protests, from gatherings against a state law targeting immigrant students in 2011 to a 2012 memorial for Trayvon Martin, the Black teenager killed as he was returning from the store.

Graetz is survived by six children; 26 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Reflecting on her experiences in 2005, Jeanie Graetz said the boycott had reminded her that many people struggle to obtain basic levels of equality, and that it shaped her and her husband's professional choices and how they raised their family.

"It's not just black and white," she said. "There are many people who are oppressed in this world — women, the poor, handicapped individuals, gays. That's what we learned."

Contact Montgomery Advertiser reporter Brian Lynn at 334-240-0885 or blynn@gannett.com.
Jeannie Graetz was an inspiration to everyone

Editor’s note: Jeannie Graetz, who with her late husband, the Rev. Robert S. Graetz Jr., supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott and endured bombs and threats as a white couple aiding the historic boycott, died Wednesday at age 90. Her death comes approximately three months after her husband died at 92 from complications of Parkinson’s disease.

We are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Jeannie Graetz. In addition to her love of family, she demonstrated a profound love of community throughout her life, whether it was during the Montgomery Bus Boycott or her later work at the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University in Montgomery.

When Jeannie’s husband became ill, she committed herself to leading the work of the Graetz Symposium, an annual conference supporting the civil rights movement, a partnership with the national center at ASU. During the most recent symposium, she spoke about how important its work was to her and the greater community.

Jeannie was also a lifelong learner, earning a bachelor’s degree at age 85. She was truly an inspiration to everyone who met her. Today, we honor her life – a life defined by service, commitment and community.

Tafeni English
Director of Southern Poverty Law Center Civil Rights Memorial Center

Rev. Robert Graetz and his wife Jeannie Graetz in Montgomery on Wednesday April 1, 2015.

Mickey Welsh/Advertiser
The Graetz Legacy

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Isaiah 6:8 (King James Version)

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Matthew 5:44
Note: This scripture was the lesson for the day at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, September 15, 1963.

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:40

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (Only what we do for Christ will last.)

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

  Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
  where there is hatred, let me sow love;
  where there is injury, pardon;
  where there is doubt, faith;
  where there is despair, hope;
  where there is darkness, light;
  where there is sadness, joy.

  O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
  to be consoled as to console,
  to be understood as to understand,
  to be loved as to love.
  For it is in giving that we receive,
  it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
  and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

  Amen.
Special Guests

Chip Hill, Chief of Staff to the Mayor

Jamyla Philyaw, Special Assistant to the Mayor

Tania Johns, Special Assistant to the Mayor

Phillip Ensler, Senior Policy Advisor to the Mayor

Sheyann Webb Christburg, Noted Author/Youth Advisor

Dr. Willie D. McClung, Pastor, Holt Street Memorial Baptist Church

Mrs. Leslie McPhillips and Atty. Julian L. McPhillips Jr., Author, Community Advocate

Nelson Malden, barber who gave Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. his first local haircut

Sandra Nickel, Veteran Realtor, Community Advocate

Valerie Smedley, Owner-Operator of Tours of Montgomery, Community Advocate

Cedric Varner, Longtime Television Talk Show Host

H. Randall Williams/Suzanne La Rosa, Book Publishers, Community Advocates
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Rev. Robert Graetz and Jeannie Graetz

Robert S. Graetz

A White Preacher’s Memoir
THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT