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### Adult Chapter Meetings

Monthly, 3rd Thursday, 6PM  
Virtual Meeting  
(except in December)

### Youth Council Meetings

At Lincoln High School

### Business Name

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P.O. Box 81322  
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**Vice President** Rebecca Gonzalez

**Secretary** Jessica Stoner

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### Message from the President

Happy New Year, Lincoln Branch Members and well-wishers,

First, let me thank you for your hard work and for your donations in support of Lincoln Branch NAACP and our activities in 2022. We were able to make a difference in the lives of many persons in our community. We provided scholarships for two students who are enrolled at UNL and have made an outstanding name for themselves. We have continued to provide community input to the Lincoln Education system through LPS and the Nebraska Department of Education. We were a part of LPS' celebration for Teachers of Color. Also we worked with community organizations (ACLU, Nebraska Volunteer Lawyers Organization, UNL College of Law and Mt. Zion Baptist Church) to offer free legal service to the public.

It seems that activities are off to a fast start. The Legislature has introduced bills that could change our lives. Activities range from tax reform, school financing, and guidelines for the new voter ID law. Sen. Justin Wayne introduced LB20 which would eliminate the two-year waiting period for felons to vote after serving their sentence.

This coming year is also election year (April 4, 2023) for city-wide political positions including the school board. We want to assure that our GOTV (get out the votes) efforts are productive. In the mid-term elections of 2022, communities of color voted at about half the rate of white voters (30% and 60% respectively). What can we do to improve these statistics?

In addition to educational issues that we are faced with, a lack of affordable housing still looms heavily over our community. Although buildings continue to rise at a rapid rate among our city scape, low income housing needs are not being met. How can we make a difference?

We don't want to lose focus on the importance of community health care as flu, RSV and COVID incidents are still a concern in our community. We want to encourage safe practices and not take unnecessary risk.

Some of the important issues that the Lincoln Branch needs to address in 2023

**cont'd on page 2**



M. Dewayne Mays, PhD  
President

## Message from the President, con't.

include the following:

1. Promote the dialogue on the diversification of the teaching and administrative staff at Lincoln Public Schools.
2. Encourage and support increased access to low-income housing in Lincoln.
3. Support and encourage reducing the prison population in Nebraska. Build programs that rehabilitate prisoners rather than building prisons.
4. Promote the Truth & Reconciliation project through financial and human support.
5. Increase membership by 20%.
6. Increase community-based support/cooperation for diverse issues.

My challenge to you our fellow NAACP workers is to choose at least one area that you would like to be involved with, take hold to it and don't let go until it's done. Are you on board? Have a prosperous 2023.

**Dewayne Mays**  
**President, Lincoln Branch NAACP**

## Tribute to Matt Blomstedt, Departing Commissioner

*Thomas Christie and Paul A. Olson*

Nebraska and Nebraska's NAACP chapters have lost a considerable force for good in the departure of Dr. Matt Blomstedt from the position of Commissioner of Education for Nebraska.

Dr. Blomstedt was named State Commissioner of Education in January 2014, about nine years ago. Before he headed the Nebraska Department of Education, he led the Nebraska Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council, and before that he was the leader of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association and was a research analyst for the Nebraska legislature. One would think that an educator with such a background would primarily be invested in the problems of rural schools and rural school finance, both of which are serious; however, though Matt attended to these issues, he also invested himself deeply in problems having to do with racism, multiculturalism, and equity in education.

Dr. Thomas Christie wrote the following in tribute to the former Commissioner:

*My first contact with Dr. Matt Blomstedt was when I was the Lincoln Public Schools Multicultural School Community Administrator. I was at the state "School Administrator's Yearly Meeting" when he presented, and I was impressed with his passion for education.*

*My next important interaction with Dr. Blomstedt came with a phone call where he informed me that he was concerned about the lack of diversity in education in the state. He asked if I was willing to meet to discuss starting a committee to focus on strategies to improve the low numbers. I agreed to be part of the discussion. I was impressed with his thoughts, but, even more, with his actions. You see, he didn't just talk; rather, he demonstrated that the search for equity must start with what you can do. He hired an African American assistant director, and as time continued his department became more culturally diverse than ever before.*

*As the Lincoln Chapter of the NAACP continued its efforts to improve the educator's goals of diversity, we reached out to the Nebraska Department of Education. As I expected, Dr. Blomstedt was very receptive to meeting and strategizing with us.*

*Together and with our continuing commitment, diversity in education became a topic that the state legislature, led by Senator Patty Pansing Brooks, addressed to good effect.*

*Dr. Blomstedt's educational knowledge and commitment to equity for all children, will be missed. We hope that the new director will continue to support needed diversity efforts!*

As Thomas Christie notes, Dr. Blomstedt did more than give the NAACP and like organizations a few patronizing words. He acted. As one of his 2019 statements observes: "Equity is at the forefront of our work at the Nebraska Department of Education



Matthew Blomstedt- (Justin Wan - Journal Star)

(NDE). With a revised Strategic Vision and Direction that elevates educational equity as a cross-cutting strategy, implementing the Commitments for Equity we outlined last year, and the continual implementation of AQUeSTT and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the NDE staff have rolled up their sleeves to be more intentional and focused on educational equity."

"This year, we are advancing the equity conversation as "Agents of Change for Equity." As we embark on this year's theme, we will continue to explore and support promising new innovations that advance educational equity. Last year, we noted that "all means all" when referring to students. We now recognize that it is important to clarify that educational equity means that each student has access to the educational resources they need at the right moment, at the right level, and with the right intensity. Join us this year as we raise the conversations on equity to make a difference in the lives of each Nebraskan we serve through our mission statement."

To realize this general goal, the Department of Education issued a set of roadmaps for the public schools of Nebraska that included desired goals for curriculum, staffing, extracurricular activities, and parent relationships. One set of roadmaps had to do with the culture of the schools and teacher diversity and read as follows. Schools were to:

- Develop a recruitment strategy to attract and retain teachers that match the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population.
- Provide high-quality leadership opportunities for teachers of color.
- Find support and connect with other education leaders by participating in Nebraska education member organizations and associations.
- Develop a new teacher support program to induct and retain highly-effective new and early-career teachers.
- Provide teacher leader and career ladder opportunities and reward teachers who take on these roles.
- Use data to place highly-effective teachers with lower-performing students.
- Provide training and support for all teachers in cultural competency and working with diverse student populations.
- Provide necessary guidance and information to train educators in mental health supports and intervention strategies.
- Provide training opportunities on restorative justice.

The Commissioner not only took the lead in developing these goals, but he endeavored to realize them through actions such as working with school districts on the goals that are announced, meeting with his staff and the Truth and Reconciliation group sponsored by the NAACP and others to make the diversity goals into something that would be seriously realized in Nebraska. He was heavily criticized for his actions to achieve diversity and justice. He was attacked for sponsoring the teaching of "Critical Race Theory" (which he did not do), but he stood steadfast. He did as good a job as a public servant can do in making the schools of Nebraska open to all children of all ethnicities and colors. For his service, the Lincoln NAACP thanks him.



# Remembering MLK and the Women Who Started the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Frank H. W. Edler

Early on Monday morning, December 5, 1955, yellow buses with green trim of the Montgomery City Lines bus company rolled out of their sheds to begin their routes as they had always done. That morning, however, something unusual happened. The buses that served primarily Black neighborhoods were escorted by two police motorcycles. Over the weekend, the bus company, the chief of police, the City Commission, and the press found out that the Black community planned a bus boycott for December 5. The Women's Political Council (WPC) decided on Thursday, December 1, the day Rosa Parks was arrested, to stage a one-day bus boycott for the following Monday. Police sent motorcycle escorts to make sure Black patrons who wanted to use the bus were "protected" from supposed "Negro goon squads" enforcing the boycott.

The supreme irony here was unmistakable. The Montgomery city officials, who had long used policing policies to enforce racial supremacy and were now enforcing racial segregation on buses, wanted to assure Black patrons they would be protected if they wanted to ride the bus. The idea of White police protection was ludicrous. If there were any African Americans tempted to ride the bus, they would have been discouraged immediately once they found out the White police were involved. According to Jo Ann Gibson Robinson's memoir *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, the police escort actually helped the boycott.



Rosa Parks in 1955 with Dr. King

Mrs. Rosa Parks (Rosa Louise McCauley) was not the first Black woman to be arrested for refusing to give up her seat for White patrons. Her case that went through the Alabama court system was separate from another lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*, that Black attorney Fred D. Gray filed in federal district court on February 1, 1956 about two months or so after the start of the boycott. Five African American women who had also been arrested

for not giving up their seats prior to Rosa Parks' arrest agreed to be plaintiffs in that case. For example, nine months before Parks was arrested, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat; so did Aurelia Browder a month after Colvin's arrest. In addition, Susie McDonald, Mary Louise Smith and Jeanetta Reece also agreed to join the case although Reece dropped out due to intimidation from her White employer.

The WPC, founded by Mary Fair Burks, used the spark of Rosa Parks' arrest to initiate the bus boycott. The WPC was an organization of Black women in Montgomery that promoted professional women, increased voter registration, and helped women who had been sexually abused. Parks was already known nationally for leading the campaign to get justice for Recy Taylor who had been raped by six White men in 1944.

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, who succeeded Burks as president of the WPC in 1950, focused the organization on the abusive

treatment of Blacks on city buses. City and state segregation laws in Alabama required the separation of races on all public transportation. In 1949 Robinson herself had been humiliated and verbally abused by a bus driver (bus drivers had "police powers" on buses and were allowed to carry guns) to the point that she left the bus fearing for her own safety. Other abuses, besides a humiliating seating arrangement and the forcible removal of African Americans from their seats if they refused to give them

up to Whites, also included a practice by some White drivers (there were no Black bus drivers) that left Black patrons stranded. To pay for the bus ride, African Americans would enter the door closest to the driver, but then were forced to leave the bus and walk outside the bus to enter through the back door. When Black patrons would leave the front of the bus to walk to the back door, bus drivers who may not have liked certain Black patrons would at times drive away leaving the patron stranded.

To ride on a Montgomery bus was a living display and a daily affirmation of White supremacy. Every day of the year African American patrons were reminded by the seating arrangement that they needed to "know their place." This daily enactment of White supremacy was especially important for White racists because they regarded Montgomery as the cradle of the Confederacy.

Robinson, an English professor at Alabama State College (now Alabama State University), took every opportunity to bring the injustice of bus segregation and the humiliation by abusive bus drivers to the attention of Mayor William A. Gayle as well as the City Hall council, but they refused to listen. She even warned them of a future boycott.

After discussing plans with Rosa Parks, secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP who had just been arrested, Robinson that very night immediately threw herself into organizing a one-day boycott for the following Monday. With the help of John Cannon, chair of the business department at Alabama State College, and two students, she managed to print out about 35,000 flyers for dissemination in the Black community. She also coordinated with Edgar Daniel Nixon who had been head of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP and then president of the Alabama state NAACP in 1947. Nixon provided bail for Parks. Her court appearance was scheduled for Monday, December 5, the day of the boycott (she was found guilty and fined fourteen dollars).

On Friday, December 2, Robinson called Nixon and told him of the proposed December 5 bus boycott. Nixon then called Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. H. H. Hubbard, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. A. W. Wilson, and Rev. Uriah J. Fields; knowing that the boycott would be supported by the Black community, the ministers all agreed to support the boycott and use the churches to facilitate communication. As Robinson says in her memoir, "[t]hus, for the first time in the history of Montgomery, black ministers united to lead action for civic improvement." Robinson and her two students left stacks of flyers at the Hilliard Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church where the Black ministers of Montgomery



Jo Ann Robinson's arrest photo

cont'd on page 4

# Negro Groups Ready Boycott Of City Lines

By JOE AZBELL

Advertiser City Editor

A "top secret" meeting of Montgomery Negroes who plan a boycott of city busses Monday is scheduled at 7 p.m. Monday at the Holt Street Baptist Church for "further instructions" in an "economic reprisal" campaign against segregation on city busses. The Advertiser learned last night.

The campaign, modelled along the lines of the White Citizens Council program, was initiated by unidentified Negro leaders after a Negro woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested by city police Thursday on a charge of violating segregation laws by sitting in the white section of a city bus.

Yesterday Negro sections were flooded with thousands of copies of mimeographed or typed letters asking Negroes to refrain from riding city busses Monday.

## SECOND TIME

The letter states:

"Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus and give it to a white person. It is the second time since the Claudette Colbert case that a Negro has been arrested for the same thing. This must be stopped. Negroes are citizens and have rights.

"Until we do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or you or you. This woman's case will come up Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the busses on Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the busses to work, to town, to school or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. If you work, take a cab or walk, but please, children and grownups, don't get on a bus at  
(See NEGRO, Page 6A)

## MLK & Montgomery Bus Boycott, con't.

were meeting on the morning of December 2. Volunteers went on to distribute the flyers door-to-door in Black communities.

Robinson and the WPC wanted to keep the boycott a secret to avoid White interference, but apparently Nixon wanted to get the word out and called Joe Azbell, a White editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, and gave him a copy of the flyer.

A meeting was called for Friday evening (December 2) under the auspices of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church whose pastor was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was a meeting well attended by the Black leadership of Montgomery. All ministers were in attendance as well as club presidents and the heads of civic and church organizations. This is where the detailed organizing took place for the Monday boycott. The most pressing problem was how to set up an alternate system of transportation for those who refused to ride the bus. More than seventy-five per cent of the city bus riders were African American.

According to Robinson, Alfonso Campbell and his transportation committee "worked all night Friday to complete this phase of the program." Volunteer drivers and car pools were set up to follow the bus routes and pick up people wherever they could. Although no formal organizational structure was established for the boycott on Friday evening, it was agreed that there would be another meeting on Monday evening at the Holt Street Baptist Church after the first day of boycott.

The Monday boycott was a resounding success. After long years of suffering under Jim Crow, African Americans smiled as bus after bus drove by empty. Black taxi drivers lowered their fare to match the price of a bus ride. Many walked. White employers also picked up Black employees who stated they refused to ride the bus or were afraid to do so.

That afternoon the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was created to coordinate activities and lay out plans for demands and negotiations relating to the boycott. A very young 26-year-old Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was elected president. After graduating from Morehouse College in 1948 and Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951, King attended Boston University for his doctoral degree that was conferred on him in early June of 1955, about six months before the boycott began. King was called to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954.

Robinson recalled the Monday evening mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church presided over by Rev. Ralph

Abernathy. Six thousand people attended in "the main auditorium, the balcony, the basement, the aisles, the front side and back yards, and for three blocks up and down Holt Street." Abernathy stated that the day did not belong to one man or to ministers alone; rather the day belonged to "45,000 black Montgomerians." When asked if the boycott should end, the audience roared back, "No!"

That evening Dr. King gave one of his first major speeches, known as the Montgomery Bus Boycott speech. He knew the enormity of the task of facing a deeply racist society; nevertheless, he emphasized the importance of keeping justice aligned with love. His speech was a rallying cry for Black Montgomerians to keep the faith and stay united. He was also fully aware of the historical significance of the moment: "Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future somebody will have to say, 'There lived a race of people a black people, 'fleecy locks and black complexion', a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization. And we're gonna do that." At the end of his speech, he also recognized the degree of sacrifice that the boycott would likely demand: "And I've come to see now that as we struggle for our rights, maybe some of them will have to die. But somebody said, if a man doesn't have something that he'll die for, he isn't fit to live."

Initially, the MIA decided on three demands to end the boycott. First, Whites would still be seated from the front and Blacks from the back of the bus, but once seated, patrons would not be forced to give up their seats. Second, the bus company should hire Black drivers for routes in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and third, bus drivers had to be equally courteous to both White and Black patrons. These demands may have been a modification of segregation, but it was still segregation. The *Miami Times* on January 14, 1956, reprinted a *Los Angeles Tribune* editorial ("Some 'Uncle Toms' We are still Meeting") that acknowledged "the rather impressive boycott staged by Negroes of Montgomery, Ala." but went on to criticize Dr. King ("a recent recipient of a Ph.D. degree") and the MIA for compromising and not demanding the complete elimination of segregation on buses.

In January 1956 NAACP lawyer Robert L. Carter made the suggestion to file a direct challenge to the segregation laws in federal court apart from Rosa Parks' case, and on February 1, 1956, Fred D. Gray and Charles D. Langford filed an injunction (*Browder v. Gayle*) **cont'd on page 5**

The first article about the Montgomery bus boycott in the *Montgomery Advertiser* written by Joe Azbell, December 4, 1955, p. 1.



## MLK & Montgomery Bus Boycott, con't.

in U. S. District Court against segregated busing.

The boycott lasted more than a year, thirteen months actually. During that time, weekly mass meetings that rotated among Black churches were held to keep spirits up and encourage unity. It was needed because the Montgomery police harassed the boycott any way they could by dispersing African Americans waiting for car pools (loitering) and pulling over car pool drivers for registration and checking the number of people in the car. On January 26, 1956, Dr. King was arrested for allegedly driving thirty miles per hour in a twenty-five-mile-an-hour zone. He was incarcerated and Rev. Abernathy posted bail for him. E. D. Nixon's front yard was bombed; King's front porch was dynamited shattering all four front windows. Luckily, Coretta Scott King heard the thud on the porch and moved to the back of the house to protect baby Yolanda, and no one was hurt.

Robinson also continued her participation in the boycott by becoming a member of the MIA's executive committee. In addition, since she attended the weekly MIA Monday meetings, she

agreed to edit single-handedly the weekly *MIA Newsletter* that went out to thousands of subscribers.

The boycott ended when the U.S. Supreme Court on November 13, 1956, summarily affirmed the previous decision of the lower federal court (June 5, 1956) that segregated busing in Montgomery violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution that guaranteed equal protection for all Americans. The final order to desegregate the buses was delayed until December 20 because the city tried to petition the Supreme Court for a rehearing.

The boycott alone may not have been able to accomplish the desegregation of Montgomery buses. As Randall Kennedy has so aptly put it in his article "Martin Luther King's Constitution: A Legal History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," it is "important to appreciate that without the suit [*Browder v. Gayle*] and the eventual support of the Supreme Court, the boycott may well have ended without attaining any of its expressed goals." Likewise, the boycott provided a crucible for the existential transformation of the Black community; to quote Kennedy again: "the act of attempting to change the world broke the spell of Negro acquiescence." The world would never be the same again.

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## November 2022 Election Results Review

*Rebecca Gonzales*

The 2022 mid-term elections provided us months of speculation, anticipation and, in the end, some surprises. Now that the months of annoying ads and phone calls have ended, let's look at what happened.

The biggest surprise happened at the federal level where Democrats increased their majority in the Senate (51-49). It's the first time since FDR that a president has not lost control of the Senate in a mid-term. Although the Republicans gained control of the House, it was by a much narrower margin – 221 to 213 – than predicted. The anticipated "red wave" (some had even predicted a "red tsunami") did not materialize, and we will probably hear a lot about why in the coming months.

**It's the first time since FDR that a president has not lost control of the Senate in a mid-term.**

In red-state Nebraska, Republicans kept control of the federal delegation with wins by Congressmen Don Bacon (R) and Mike Flood (R). Though both Democratic challengers won in Douglas and Lancaster counties, that urban support could not overcome rural support for the Republicans and the overall advantage the Republicans have in voter registrations. The total votes cast in Lancaster County was 115,977 votes (57%) out of 201,471 registered voters.

In the 1st District, Patty Pansing Brooks (D) who came within 6% of Flood in the June general election, lost by 16% (58% - 42%). The 1st District has about 68,000 more registered Republicans than Democrats and Pansing Brooks lost by 35,307. Pansing Brooks won Lancaster County by 6,402 votes (53% - 47%) but

could not overcome the rural support for Flood which in some counties was over 80%.

A similar scenario played out in the 2nd District where Democrat Tony Vargas won Douglas County (51% to 49%) but lost in Sarpy (65%-35%) and Saunders counties (76%-24%). In the governor's race, Jim Pillen (R) beat Carol Blood (D) 59.9% (394,892) to 36.1% (238,056) with 4% voting for Libertarian Scott Zimmerman. Pillen had the highest vote share of any first-time governor at 60%. Blood won Lancaster and Douglas County but lost in all the other counties.

Statewide, Republican registrations continued to rise giving them a 261,000-person voter registration advantage over Democrats. Between January and December 2022, Democratic voter registrations dropped statewide by over 9000. Active voter registration in Nebraska across all parties increased by 3620. Democrats did not run candidates for Secretary of State, treasurer, state auditor or attorney general.

Democratic party chair Jane Kleeb said the party needs to improve turnout in Douglas and Sarpy Counties — where 53% of voters participated — and try to match higher turnout in Lancaster County, where 57% voted in 2022. Lancaster, Douglas and Sarpy counties are home to the state's largest pockets of Democrats.

At the non-partisan state Legislature, Democrats kept the 17 votes necessary to filibuster legislation but Republicans have the majority (32) and have already started to discuss how to shape the next legislative session. While the secret ballot to elect committee chairs was retained, other rule changes could be one way to consolidate their power. The Nebraska Legislature has 18 women members (9 Democrats and 9 Republicans) this year, a record number. And John Fredrickson (Omaha D-20) made history as the first openly gay member of the state legislature.

Gov. Ricketts and Sandhills Publishing's Tom Peed poured big money late into two local races. The Lancaster County attorney race pitted former senator Adam Morfeld against Pillen's pick and eventual winner Tom Condon and the Douglas County Sheriff's race where Aaron Hanson defeated former Deputy Chief Greg Gonzalez. Democrat Jay Pitts ran a close race against Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner.

The Legislative session started January 4 and promises to continue the battles on women's reproductive health, implementation of voter ID, property tax and educational funding.

## Nebraska Underground Railroad Site Recognized by the National Park Service's Network to Freedom Program

Mary K Stillwell

The site of the Dorrington House and Barn, located in Falls City, Nebraska, has been recognized by the National Park Service's Network to Freedom. Ann and David Dorrington, the owners, are credited with saving dozens of men and women fleeing enslavement during the years immediately preceding the Civil war.\*

Just four miles north of the Kansas border, Falls City, was founded in 1857 by the Dorringtons and others in 1857, three years after the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed. The Act fueled tensions over slavery and led to raids and armed clashes that have come to be known as "Bleeding Kansas" or "The Border War." The Dorringtons and like-minded residents were in a prime location to serve as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

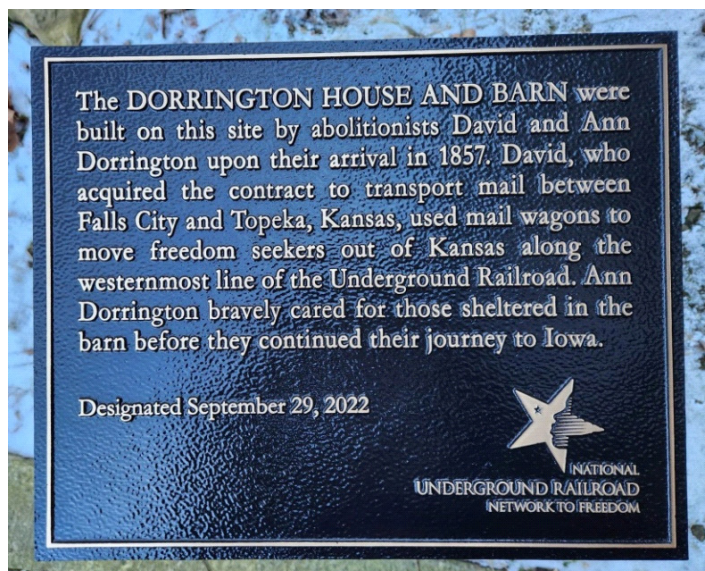
J. Sterling Morton, a pro-slavery politician and newspaper editor, better known today as the founder of Arbor Day, referred to the newly formed town as an "abolitionist hole," calling its residents a "scurvy horde of rascallions."

Dorrington, a carpenter and builder by trade, obtained a federal contract to carry mail from nearby Rulo, Nebraska, to Topeka, Kansas, that provided a relatively safe way to convey men and women seeking freedom. Impeding the mail transport in any way was a federal crime, so "the mail wagon, with a secret compartment to conceal runaways, could pass without being stopped by bounty hunters and pro-slavery militia." The Dorrington barn provided a safe resting place and a promise of food and water to those on the run who could then continue on at nightfall, "sometimes under a wagon of corn."



David and Ann Dorrington

Falls City native Robert Nelson, a former Omaha World Herald columnist and a descendant of the Dorringtons, applied for Network to Freedom recognition based on his historical research. The Dorringtons, he learned, emigrated from England in 1842, and after a brief stay in New York headed west to Kansas where James Lane, another Falls City



Plaque recognizing the Dorrington House and Barn as a site of the Underground Railroad.

founding father, was a leader of the free-state movement.

The Network to Freedom plaque will be installed at the Collections Museum, 1601-1603 Stone Street, site of the Dorrington house and barn which was torn down after a fire in 1877. The bronze plaque was unveiled November 25<sup>th</sup> at a ceremony held in conjunction with the town's annual Christmas Parade. This brings a total of 15 Network to Freedom sites in Nebraska.

NOTES: A new building was constructed on the site of the Dorrington house and barn in 1881 and later remodeled. It served as the Falter Clothing Store, operated (1916-1999) by John and Harriet Falter, the parents of John Falter, a well-known American artist, whose *Saturday Evening Post* covers include "Christmas in Falls City," December 21, 1946.

Another local abolitionist and Morton's political rival, Elmer Dundy, served as the federal judge twenty years later in the case brought by Ponca Chief Standing Bear that resulted in the landmark ruling that "an Indian is a person" under the law.

Lane and Dundy still serve as street names in the town of just over 4,000 residents. Morton Street, running parallel to Lane, likely suggests the sentiments of others in the new and growing town.

Photographs courtesy of Robert Nelson and Dave Kentoff.

\*Quotes and information on the Network to Freedom recognition for this article are taken from a story by Paul Hammel, dated November 26, 2022, that appeared in the *Nebraska Examiner*.

<https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2022/11/26/underground-railroad-site-in-falls-city-recognized-by-national-park-service/> (accessed 11/30/2022).

Facts regarding the founding of Falls City from an early source come from [http://www.kancoll.org/books/andreas\\_ne/richardson/richardson-p3.html#fallscity](http://www.kancoll.org/books/andreas_ne/richardson/richardson-p3.html#fallscity)

## Lincoln NAACP Committee Members

### Chair of Education Committee

Thomas Christie

### Chair of Legal Redress Committee

Catherine Wilson

### Chair of Political Action Committee

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### Advisory Committee

Chassidy S. Jackson-Goodwin

### Newsletter Editor

Frank Edler

### Assistant Editors

Kathleen Rutledge, Mary K. Stillwell, and Micaela Fikar



## Voter ID Restrictions: Where We Are Now

*Romulo "RJ" Vega*  
*Community Organizer, Nebraska Appleseed*

Here is one thing we know: strong democracies are centered around community power and participation. When we vote, we make our voices heard. We have a powerful say in the decisions that affect our families and our community. In the words of the late Rep. John Lewis, "My dear friends, your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union." Indeed it is a most powerful tool, and for a long time, the Nebraska state constitution reflected such a sentiment: "All elections shall be free; and there shall be no hindrance or impediment to the right of a qualified voter to exercise the elective franchise."

Unfortunately, what has worked so well for so long, has now been amended and upended. Based on the results of the November 2022 midterm elections, Nebraska ballot initiative 432 received enough votes to advance a voter ID restriction. In short, this now requires some still-to-be-determined form of identification to be presented at the polls on election day in order for voters to access their ballot. Let us pause a moment to process the gravity of this very notion: that in order to exercise our constitutional right to vote in a free and fair election, as eligible Nebraskans have done with integrity and security for years, we will now face an additional barrier to participating in our own democracy, an additional barrier that was sold to the people of Nebraska as a response to unfounded, radicalized allegations of voter fraud.

Fellow Nebraskans, this is extremely troubling. Instead of devising strategies to increase civic participation and voter turnout, special interest groups have instead funded a campaign that will now place an unnecessary requirement that, as of this writing, now passes the burden onto the Nebraska legislature to define the implementation of this vaguely-worded initiative. We the people of Nebraska must now keep a close eye on our state senators, and we must reach out to them to express our concerns about this exclusionary, complicated, and costly initiative. To further expand on this, I want to take a moment to note what the dangers are, and who will most likely be affected. Generally, and this sadly comes as no surprise, this is an issue that will likely affect many voters of color, rural voters, elderly voters, and voters with disabilities. Here are a few more thoughts to ponder.

**Nebraska voters without drivers' licenses:** This is where we must pay attention to the implementation process that the Nebraska Legislature will define for us. The most commonly discussed "approved" ID is the state-issued driver's license. However, even that gets complicated. If a Nebraska voter doesn't have a valid driver's license, it is still unclear what other forms of "approved" ID will be acceptable to present on election day. Additionally, if someone has a valid driver's license, but their address isn't current on the license, the uncertainty is that the voter may be turned away from the polls. As you can see, Voter ID has opened up a Pandora's box full of complications, and we must remember one important thing: not all Nebraska voters have driver's licenses! According to an estimate from Civic Nebraska, there may be at least 54,500 potential Nebraska voters at risk of getting denied access to their ballot due to not having such an ID. Think of the impact that will have on community members such as college students who may not have a permanent address beyond a yearly lease, as well as rural voters who may not have easy access to a local DMV office, which in rural communities may operate with reduced

hours.

**Nebraska taxpayers:** First and foremost, Nebraska elections are already secure and conducted with integrity – so much so that Nebraska has long been a model for the rest of the nation. According to the Nebraskans for Free and Fair Elections coalition and the website NoHindrance.org, Nebraska has had zero documented cases of voter fraud. In addition, according to estimates from Civic Nebraska based on similar Voter ID bills from the past, it may cost almost \$3 million to implement this restriction, with a \$1 million cost every year going forward to sustain the restriction. Ask your state senator for details about what the estimated costs will be with this new initiative, who will be paying the bill for all of this, and where the money will be coming from. Make sure to mention the additional support that will be needed by local county election offices as they implement such a large-scale change.

**Nebraskans who vote early/vote by mail:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Nebraskans voted by mail for the first time, leading to record voter turnout during the 2020 election. During the 2022 election, the convenience and efficiency of voting early and voting by mail continued, as many Nebraskans with rigid work schedules, limited transportation options, or hectic family lives appreciated not having to show up to the polls in-person on election day. How will this new Voter ID restriction affect early voting? One discussion point is that it may require all early voters to submit a copy of their photo ID and mail it along with their early ballot, which again would place an additional barrier between voters and their constitutional right to vote. And sadly, voters with limited time and access to technology and transportation will be at risk of being excluded from the electoral process.

**In the end, this is all about power and control.** Sadly, the history of the United States is full of examples of actions that, under the guise of order and security, have led to the exclusion of many community members from being fully included in the decision-making processes that affect their communities. Although this may be infuriating in the moment, despair is not an option. Too many people have fought and sacrificed so that many of us could have our rights recognized. Here are a few thoughts on what we can do to help protect the rights of Nebraska voters.

**Contact your state senator and others in the Nebraska legislature.** There are many ways you can contact your state senator, whether in-person, by phone, by email, or by the legislature's online portal. If you aren't sure who your state senator is, there is a search feature at <https://nebraskalegislature.gov>.

**Amid this change, there may be room for improvement.** As you reach out to your state senator and other important voices, know that this is also a moment to ponder other ways to advance ideas that can help increase voter turnout in Nebraska. An example would be to make election day a state holiday, so that community members may have the day off from work to participate in the election process.

**Discuss this issue with your own circle of friends and family.** Often, the most meaningful voices are those closest to us. By speaking to those close to us, we might sway those who are undecided and inform those who hadn't yet given the issue a lot of thought. Remember, voting is centered on community power, so be open to speaking with those you view as your community about these issues.

**Consider volunteering or supporting nonprofits and other civic-centered organizations.** There are direct-service nonprofits and civic-centered organizations that work hard to make sure that many Nebraskans have what they need to vote each election cycle. Often, they serve many of the communities that are most often excluded from decision-making, **cont'd on page 8**

## Voter ID Restrictions, con't.

so we need to do what we can to inform ourselves of the local organizations in our area and how we can best support their non-partisan missions.

**In closing, the time is now.** It's time to build power together, and do what we can to advocate for the Nebraska legislature to move forward with implementing Voter ID in a way that minimizes the barriers that turn Nebraskans away from the polls. We must work together, as all eligible voters should have a say in the decisions that affect their families and communities. After all, Nebraska actually has a rich history of resisting partisan theatrics, and we even proudly display words written on the entrance of the capitol, "The Salvation of the State is Watchfulness in the Citizen."

**Update on Voter ID legislation.** Several bills have been introduced in the 2023 legislature that deal with voter ID. Senator Day's LB675 is the least problematic Voter ID bill before the Legislature. It provides a clear list of acceptable IDs and voter-friendly accommodations. LB 675 also includes alternative steps for voters who do not have an acceptable ID, and other provisions like expanded DMV hours, and a public relations campaign (with a grace period) to inform voters of the changes that would be implemented by 2026. Read up on the other provisions of LB 675, and voice your support for this bill (and your opposition to other, more restrictive voter ID bills like LB230 and LB535) to your state senator today!

## Tribute to Ann Williams

Vernon Williams

Ann Williams was a supporter of the Lincoln NAACP. She stood behind Vernon's purchase of a table at the banquet each year until she and Vernon could no longer attend. She welcomed Vernon's participation in the efforts of the Lincoln branch and often asked if the dues were paid.



Ann Williams

She was not a joiner, but she stood firmly behind Vernon's participation in the efforts of the branch. Although she didn't join organized groups, she needed others and could be a fierce defender of people and principles she believed in.

She would have felt most gratified to know that NAACP Lincoln was represented at her commemoration. Ann was devoted to her flowers and her cat. She loved her neighbors. She will be missed by those who knew her.

## Books Behind Bars Nebraska

During the Holiday Season Lincoln Branch member Daniel Windham organized and distributed over 300 books to the Department of Corrections Libraries. Some highlights include:

1. Batman Trade books
2. Two sets of the Harry Potter Series
3. Books about Black history: the Congo and decolonization.
4. Children's books,
5. Up-to-date IT certification books.

Because of the literacy problems that incarcerated individuals have, books you might not consider adult worthy are of great value: such as manga, children books, trade books and newspaper comic books. Law books are needed. Children's books are useful; it allows those incarcerated to read books to their children during visitation. As we roll into Summer 2023 we plan to do a library book donation officially through the Lincoln Branch NAACP. I encourage everyone to start thinking about books you can say goodbye to and cherish thinking about them in their new forever home! Keep reading the newsletter as we roll into the summer for more information on how/when to donate!

## Book Review

Jackie Egan

*My Face is Black is True: Callie House and the struggle for ex-slave reparation* by Mary Francis Berry (2005)

Author Mary Francis Berry, an historian, captures Callie House's character and her influence in her time. Callie House took a two pronged approach to advocacy; she worked to change federal policies to create pensions for ex-slaves and she worked to meet specific needs—food, clothing, burial funds—as she worked to organize people.

Callie House (1861-1928), the first African American to lead the first mass reparation movement, was an advocate and an ex-slave. She was initially an advocate for African American soldiers who served in the Union Army to receive a pension and other benefits for their service to this country. White Union Army veterans received benefits and pensions. Most Black Union Army veterans did not. "Callie and other African-Americans had Union veterans in their families and they knew pensions were available, although widows and children had difficulty obtaining them because they lacked documentation of their marriages and births (p. 34)" and they often lacked documentation to prove their surnames.

House lived in South Nashville with her children, next door to her brother and his family. Her brother and she were emancipated in 1865 when Tennessee freed enslaved Black people. She began her advocacy-work in Southern Nashville doing basic community organizing in addition to raising her children and working as a laundress or as a domestic. Later she worked traveling to towns and cities across the South speaking to primarily Black audiences about developing local, grassroots organizations to petition the federal legislature to pay pensions and to distribute land (as promised in the 1865 Freedmen's Bureau Act) to freedmen and women. As a result of her campaigns, the organizations she developed began to provide food, clothing, medical care,



Callie House

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## Book Review, con't.

burial assistance to freedmen and women many of whom had become destitute, ill, and elderly. While she traveled, her brother and his family tended her household.

"By the early twentieth century, her organization, the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, according to federal officials, would swell to about 300,000, determined black people petitioning a government that barely recognized their existence and demanding a law ordering reparations for slavery (p. 7)."

House told freedmen and freedwomen their right to ask for a compensation law was guaranteed by the Constitution. She never claimed the government would pay nor did she claim that anyone would receive a pension. But she did use the U. S. Postal Service for receiving dues from members of her organization. She was accused of postal fraud and was hounded by postal service enforcers throughout her later travels. Eventually she was charged, found guilty for postal fraud, and served a year in federal prison. In the court hearings no specific evidence was ever pre-

sented supporting the allegations that she lied to her constituents or that she misused funds.

Some quotations that demonstrate Mrs. House's personality and her clarity of thought include: "My face is black is true but it's not my fault but I love my name and my honesty in dealing with my fellow man."

When accused of misleading members, she rejected the charge made by Judge Barrett by saying: "We tell them we don't know whether they will ever get anything or not but that there is something due them and if they are willing to risk their money in defraying the expenses of getting up the petition to Congress they are at liberty to do so."

I especially treasure the Callie House story as portrayed by Mary Francis Berry, because as a social worker, I have advocated for policy changes and I have worked to meet people's individual and personal needs. Her story resonates with me.

I hope you will consider reading more about this important and powerful woman.

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## Justice in Action: The Power of Organized People

*Contributed by Beth Graverholt, Lead Organizer*

### **Justice in Action Participating Faith Communities**

Antelope Valley Park Church of the Brethren

Christ UMC/Connection Point

Denton UMC

Eastridge Presbyterian

First Presbyterian

First UMC - Lincoln

First UMC - Waverly

Horizons UMC

Nebraska Wesleyan University

Neighbors UMC

New Hope UMC

New Visions Community UMC

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

South Gate UMC

Southwood Lutheran

St David's Episcopal

St Mark UMC

St Mark's on the Campus Episcopal

Trinity UMC

Unitarian Church of Lincoln

Justice in Action is the recently formed Lincoln affiliate of DART (The Direct Action and Research Training Center), a national network of congregation-based community organizations advocating for justice and fairness. DART affiliates have been active in 28 metropolitan areas across 10 states since its inception in 1982.

The DART philosophy recognizes two types of power in the public arena: organized money and organized people. By organizing people, citizens have the power to build collective will to transform their communities.

As an example, 17 churches in Wyandotte County, Kansas organized an initiative they call *Churches United for Justice*. In June 2022, more than 1,000 congregants met with the mayor and commissioners at the Nehemiah Action. Their goal was to prioritize federal stimulus money for the two urgent needs identified at their fall House Meetings and researched throughout the winter. Their issues were:

- An affordable housing and equity trust fund to reverse the effects of red-lining; and

- Implementation of group violence intervention, a proven strategy to reduce gun violence.

*Churches United for Justice* won commitments from three local officials at the meeting in June and are currently following up to ensure victory in these campaigns.

### **Justice in Action By the Numbers**

- 243 Attended "Rethinking Justice" Workshops

- 88 House Meetings held with  
627 total participants

- 300 Attended Community Problems Assembly

- 140 Attended Research Training

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3.30.23 - Justice in Action Rally

5.4.23 - Nehemiah Action

The process started in Lincoln/Lancaster County with meetings among leaders of local faith communities throughout 2021. The first meeting with lay leaders of those congregations occurred in August 2022. Following the DART process, 88 House Meetings were held in October asking, "What keeps you up at night?" Responses from those meetings were tabulated to determine which issues were most frequently cited. In November, 300 people gathered to vote on the top two issues in Lincoln/Lancaster County that Justice in Action would tackle this year. The selected issues are:

- Criminal Justice Reform
- Mental Health

Since then, 140 people—70 on each issue—are researching possible actions that can affect change in our community. The proven DART research approach includes a series of interviews with people working in the field as well as a scan for secondary research on the topic. Results of the research process will be presented at a Justice in Action Rally on March 30th and presented to the appropriate public officials at the Nehemiah Action on May 4.

The process of House Meetings, Community Problems Assembly, Research, Rally, and Nehemiah Action will occur annually from fall through late spring, as it has in other DART cities for years.

All interested and/or affected residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County are encouraged to join the Justice in Action Network. Membership in a participating faith community is not necessary. For more information, contact Lead Organizer Beth Graverholt at [beth@thedartcenter.org](mailto:beth@thedartcenter.org).