**Rev. Dr. Wesley S. Matthews**

Rev. Dr. Wesley S. Matthews was born January 28, 1912 in Cartersville, GA, a son of the Rev. R.T, and Anna Smith Matthews. He was a graduate of Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta, GA, where he received the *Atlanta Journal Herald’s* “Distinguished Cup” for being the best all-around student in Atlanta in 1935. At Wilberforce University he became a popular campus figure and his associates of those days still referred to him by his nickname, “Tampa.”

Upon graduation from Wilberforce University, the direction of his eventual career took shape with his work at the Linden Community Center in Dayton, where he began forming the ideas about the importance of recreational programs for seniors. In 1934, he married Wilberforce student Ruth M. (Pat) Fields, of Oberlin. He returned to Wilberforce to study at Payne Theological Seminary, from which the African Methodist Episcopal Church sent him to Central Chapel A.M.E. Church in Yellow Springs in 1941, where he created a community playground in a vacant lot next to the church, established an enrichment program for boys in the parsonage, set up a series of volunteer-run recreational classes and led a sit-in to integrate Yellow Springs’ only motion picture theatre. What was eventually known as the High Street Community Center was noted as an interracial program designed around the specific needs of the neighborhood; and Central Chapel was integrated peacefully, with several whites accepted.

After a stint in Cincinnati he was assigned to Quinn Chapel in Chillicothe where he organized the Carver Community Center and in 1945 was voted the Jaycees’ “Man of the Year” for outstanding civic service. Assignment to Trinity A.M.E. Church in Springfield brought him back in contact with Yellow Springs, where he became part-time director for the newly organized Yellow Springs Center and continued in the directorship for the next fifteen year.

In 1962 Rev. Matthews moved his family from Springfield, Ohio to Yellow Springs. The home at 220 Pleasant Street was initially purchased by Eleanor Switzer, a white friend and colleague of his wife Pat Matthews at the *Yellow Springs News*, who in turn sold the home to Rev. Matthews, thereby integrating Pleasant Street. During this time, the center was recognized at a national level as a model for small communities in programs of services for seniors. Simultaneously, he was part-time pastor for St. Paul’s A.M.E. Church in Urbana, where he organized Champaign County’s first Head Start program and the Prophets of St. Paul’s A.M.E. Church choral group. Eventually, he shifted his attention to helping to organize and subsequently to direct the Greene County Commission on Aging. Poor health forced his retirement as director of the Commission in June of 1977. Upon retiring, he became a member of Central Chapel A.M.E. Church.

Rev. Matthews died on May 30, 1979. He was survived by his widow, Patricia, four daughters, Domina Matthews, Kriza Jennings, Westina Matthews, and Barbara Matthews, and a son, Wesley Matthews, II

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