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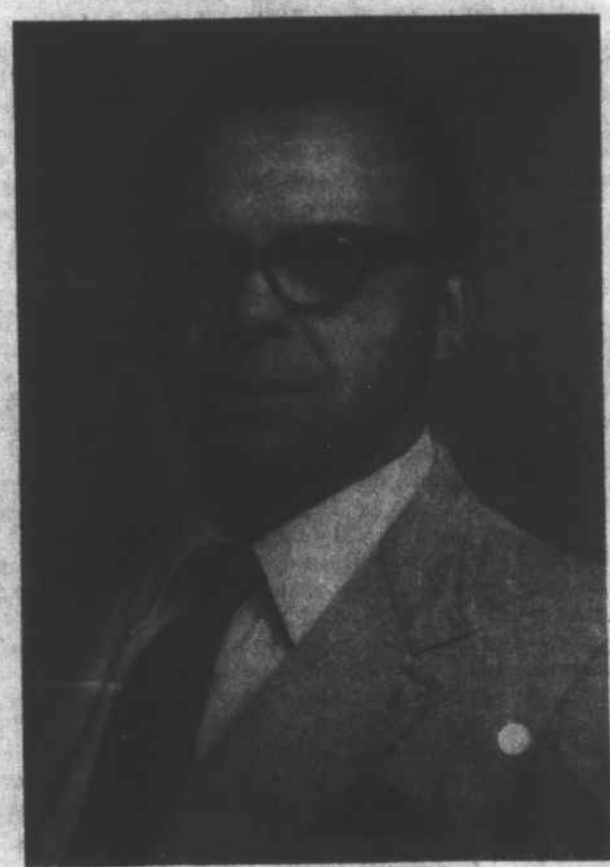
The Carolina Indian Voice

N.C. "Building Communicative Bridges In A Tri-Racial Setting" Robeson County

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EV. ELIAS ROGERS IS STILL CHOICE FOR LREMC BOARD



Rev. Elias Rogers

A News analysis: This article contains opinions of the writer.
by Bruce Barton

I don't get as fired up as I used to about a lot of things...but Rev. Elias Rogers is still my choice for a seat on the LREMC Board of Directors. He's up for election again next Tuesday October 16, at the electric cooperative's annual meeting which will be held at PSU's Performing Arts Center. And, as usual, Rev. Rogers has stiff competition. No doubt about it...people still get riled up about him. He's one of those people that we find it awfully tough to be neutral about. And, like everybody else, I have an opinion about him.

I hold Rev. Elias Rogers in high regard. As a matter of fact I consider him a hero of mine, as well as probably one of my best friends ever. He's dependable, and his word is his bond. Too, many of us would like to forget the past. The only problem is that we will repeat history if we do not tell the story truthfully. For those of you who might have forgotten, let me tell the story of Rev. Elias Rogers and the time he kicked the door down at Lumbee River Electric Membership Corporation so that the rest of us might walk in without reprisals.

SOME BACKGROUND PRIOR TO THE ELECTION

Lumbee River electric Membership Corporation was chartered in June, 1940, but minorities really became interested in the rural electric co-op at the advent of Elias Rogers who was the first minority ever elected to the board of directors of the approximately 16,000 membership co-op in 1967.

Rogers, an Indian from the Red Springs area, was elected at the annual meeting in 1967. Rogers noted in a recent interview, "One day in 1967, out of the blue I received an anonymous letter...I have never found out who sent the letter...telling me exactly what to do in order to be elected to the board of directors of Lumbee River EMC. I followed the instructions of the letter exactly...and I was elected."

Rogers' election was the beginning of one of the cruelest episodes in the history of racial relations in Robeson and adjoining counties. Said Rogers, "The president of the board of directors (then Cecil Dunn of Lumber Bridge) went two and one-half years without ever speaking to me." Rogers was shunned. And he spent two and one-half years in isolation. He was ignored by the other members of the board.

IN 1970 Rogers ran for re-election. After seemingly having won the election, it was announced after the balloting that he had lost. Rogers challenged the board of directors. The department of agriculture, which is the sponsoring agency of all electric membership co-ops, investigated and found that illegal proxies had been prepared and voted in the election.

But the investigation by the department of agriculture did not clear the way for Rogers to take his seat until April of 1972. Rogers, through his attorney Phil Diehl of Raeford, filed a suit against the Lumbee River EMC in August of 1972 under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, contending that the defendants, employees of the co-op, conspired to deny him a seat on the board of directors because of his race. Rogers charged he was defeated for election to the board by the irregular use of proxy votes. He was running for re-election at the time (November, 1970).

Rogers contended in his suit that Cecil Dunn, then president of the co-op, engineered an effort whereby hundreds of phony proxy votes were printed to insure he would not be re-elected to the board.

He further contended that employees of the co-op were threatened with dismissal if they did not go along with the scheme. The employees were given the phony ballots and told to obtain signatures from individual subscribers of the co-op. Rogers contended in his damage suit.

The suit further charged that, on election day, persons who were not members of the co-op were recruited by Dunn, given membership and five proxy votes to cast. Rogers was defeated in the election by one of the defendants named in the suit. W.B. McDiarmid.

Rogers also alleged that the defendants conspired to defeat a black candidate for the board, Thomas W. Betha.

Defendants in the suit were the corporation itself, Dunn, McDiarmid, Neil A. Watson, D.J. Dalton, then general manager of the co-op, Robert W. Currie, Irwin Currie, Gail

Boyles, and Genevive Edens.

The Agriculture Department, after investigation of the case, ordered that the by-laws of the corporation be amended to increase the size of the board from nine to 12 members. Rogers' term expired in 1974, after which the seats were filled by elections established on staggered terms.

In 1974, Rogers was elected to a one year term. In figuring the actual damages, Rogers estimated he had spent 356 man hours investigating his case and gathering evidence.

After a long and acrimonious struggle, Rogers won a sizable monetary settlement from Lumbee River Electric-Membership Corporation. More importantly, he wrung an admission from LREMC that there had been gross inequities in hiring minorities by the co-op.

Part of the settlement out of court was that the LREMC would adopt and implement an affirmative action plan in accordance with Executive Order #11246, and the rules and regulations of the Rural Electrification Administration and the office of Federal Contract Compliance.

As noted earlier, the corporation also agreed to amend its by-laws by adding three at large directors.

The corporation also was directed by the settlement to amend its by-laws so that any member of the corporation could inspect proxy lists at least two days before an annual meeting. (This has since been amended further to do away with proxy votes entirely.)

WHO IS ON THE BOARD NOW

Prior to the federal suit that seated Elias Rogers on the board, the board was composed of all white members. The general manager was white, as well as the employees, with the exception of one Indian who was working on the grounds.

The present board of directors is composed of 12 members

meeting. There is now 10 Indians serving and 2 black. The general manager is now Indian and the employees are composed of whites, blacks and Indians.

THINGS CHANGE AND STAY THE SAME

Although Rev. Elias Rogers fought a long hard and many times lonely battle to obtain representation for minorities, it seems that it is always Indians who seek to defeat him. Almost every opponent he has had has been an Indian. It seems that although he made it possible for Indians to serve, the whites still use the old "divide and conquer" philosophy. The Rev. Rogers carries the scars of many years of fighting and being attacked by his own. Let's cease and desist and declare today that we will elect Rev. Elias Rogers to the LREMC Board of Directors. Not only because he opened the doors for us all, but because he is the most knowledgeable one

Let's keep experience working for us. Join me at the PSU Performing Arts Center on Oct. 16 and show our appreciation to Rev. Rogers and thank him by voting to elect him to represent us all.

New Accounting Firm Now in Pembroke

The accounting firm of Israel W. Rwejuna, Certified Public Accountant, has recently opened an office in Pembroke, NC. The firm is headquartered in Fayetteville, NC and has established the new Pembroke location in response to a growing demand for accounting and tax services in the Pembroke and Lumberton area.

The accounting firm was founded by Israel W. Rwejuna, a CPA from Fayetteville. He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio and an MBA Degree from Eastern Illinois University in Illinois. In addition to managing the accounting firm, Mr. Rwejuna has been an instructor of Accounting at Fayetteville State University since 1975. He also holds membership in the following professional organizations: American Institute of CPAs, North Carolina Association of CPAs, National Association of Black Accountants, American Accounting Association, and the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce.

The firm recently welcomed Joseph H. Files, a Certified Public Accountant, to the staff. Mr. Files is a Magna Cum Laude graduate of Fayetteville State

University where he earned a bachelor's Degree and also he earned an MBA Degree from Atlanta University. He has worked with Deloitte Touche, a major accounting firm in New York where he performed audits of companies engaged in manufacturing, leasing, franchising and non-profit organizations. He has also worked with Hercules Incorporated as an internal auditor where he was responsible for reviewing accounting, financial and operating controls for domestic as well as international locations. Mr. Files is a member of the American Institute of CPAs, New York Society of CPAs, and the National Association of Black Accountants.

Mr. Rwejuna and Mr. Files believe that the firm is well suited to meet the unique needs of the small minority business community. They are committed to the development of minority businesses and feel that their skills and sense of commitment enables them to provide their clients with the service needed to successfully operate a business.

The new office is located in the AARK building at 107 second street in Pembroke. Phone (919) 521-9082.

Pembroke Kiwanis Report

Program Chairman Grady Hunt presented Miss Nahir Locklear, Miss Lumbee for 1990. Nahir is a freshman at PSU, a graduate of Purnell Swett High School and a business major at PSU. Her parents are Denzel and Joan Locklear. She is the oldest of four children and has enjoyed traveling, participating in the Indian Unity pageant in Baltimore, leaves Saturday for San Diego, CA and will be entered in a pageant in New Mexico and will be in the Miss Indian USA pageant in Washington, D.C. in November. Miss Locklear is a pianist as her talent.

Buddy Bell announced the clean up will be re scheduled for a later date.

President Mitchell Lowery announced Charter Night is next week with the ladies present.

Mrs. Agnes Chavis' classroom needs curtains so the Club voted the \$74 to cover the expense.

Five members of the West Lumberton Club were visitors: Dobbs Oxendine, Lance Harding, Ronald Hammonds, L.J. Jones and Harold Hunt.

Presiding-Mitchell Lowry; program-Grady Hunt; Song Leader- Ed Teets; Invocation- Pete Jacobs; Reporter- Ken Johnson.

Ransom gets position

Administration Secretary James S. Lofton announced recently the appointment of Vicki Ransom of Raleigh as the coordinator of the N.C. Internship Program. The program is part of the Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office in the N.C. Department of Administration.

Ransom, 38, assumed her new duties Aug. 15. "Ms. Ransom will be an asset to our Department in working with young people who are exploring career opportunities and ways to serve the people of this state," Secretary Lofton said in making the announcement.

Originally from Pembroke, Ransom, a Lumbee Indian, is a graduate of PSU. She has coordinated the Students Against Driving Drunk Program, also in the Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office. She was formerly a program consultant in the Office of Volunteer Services in the N.C. Department of Human Resources.

The Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office speaks for children and youth and offers a variety of opportunities for young people to become involved with government. The internship program offers opportunities for college students to work and learn during summer jobs with state government.

Oxendine Tire Center
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CONGRATULATES
THE PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

The Purnell Swett High Rams
For the great effort against Richmond County High Congratulations also to the coaches and staff for their support
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