

Markers honor Laney-Walker library founder, lawyer

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Staff Writer

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The Rev. Samuel Butler Wallace was a champion for the children.

A lifelong Augustan, Wallace fought to give black children of Augusta their first library in the historic Laney-Walker neighborhood.

“He lobbied the white community and finally convinced them this was the right thing to do,” said Harry James, the chairman of the Augusta African-American Historical Society.

The city donated an old firehouse on Gwinnett Street for the library in 1937. The black community donated books.

The library occupied the site until the opening of its current location at 1237 Laney-Walker Blvd. in April 1958, when it was named for Wallace.

A monument honoring his contributions was dedicated Saturday in front of the Wallace Branch Library. Nearby, another monument was dedicated for Judson Lyons, who was the first black attorney in Georgia and practiced law in Augusta.

Lyons was born in 1860 in Burke County and was admitted to the Georgia Bar Association in 1884. In 1898, he was appointed by President William McKinley as registrar of the U.S. Treasury, James said.

“He is one of the few African-Americans whose name is written on U.S. currency,” he said.

Lyons later served as president of Haines Institute, a private black high school. He died in 1924.

The monuments are the 12th and 13th to be erected on the Laney-Walker Walk of Fame. The historical society has a goal of building 50 markers for noteworthy people on both sides of Laney-Walker.

Wallace, also a former Buffalo soldier and pastor at Trinity CME Church, ran the library until his death in 1938. His wife, Etta V. Wallace, continued operating it until 1953.

“It still serves thousands within the community. Every time I drive by there you see children doing their homework,” James said.

Joyce Law grew up in the nearby Bethlehem neighborhood and went to school at Immaculate Conception Catholic School on Laney-Walker. She remembers the library getting lots of use during her childhood, and she brought her son back to check out books.

“The library was in the center of the educational institutes at the time,” she said. “The library became a focal point for education.”

LANEY-WALKER WALK OF FAME

Monuments for the Rev. Samuel Butler Wallace and his wife, Etta V. Wallace, and Judson Lyons were added Saturday to the the Laney-Walker Walk of Fame. The other markers honor:

- Dr. James E. Carter, the first licensed black dentist in Augusta
- Dr. George N. Stoney, a prominent medical researcher
- Dr. A.R. Johnson, a famed educator
- Dr. John Hope, the first black president of Morehouse College

- Rev. William Jefferson White, the founder of Morehouse College
- James Nabrit, a former dean of Howard University Law School and former president of Howard University
- Lucy Craft Laney, the founder of the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute and the Lamar School of Nursing
- John McClinton Tutt, a hall of fame coach at Haines and Laney High School
- Essie McIntyre, the first black woman ordained in the Augusta area
- Edward McIntyre Sr., the first black mayor of Augusta
- The Rev. C.T. Walker, the founder of Tabernacle Baptist Church and Walker Baptist Institute

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