

Wilcox County 45th Anniversary Freedom Movement Coalition

To Participate in March 1st Event Contact Organizers: Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews at 334-682-5088 or Rosetta Anderson at 334-682-4776.

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The 45th Commemorative March, Mass Meeting and reception will be held in celebration of the Voting Rights effort of Wilcox County and the many Freedom Fighters who fought diligently for justice will be held Monday, March 1 in Camden, Ala. All events are free and open to the public.

The events will begin with the march from Historic Antioch Baptist Church to the Wilcox County Courthouse at 4:30 p.m., followed by a 5 p.m. reception at The Lena Powell Convention Center and ending with a Mass Meeting at the Historic Antioch Baptist Church at 6 p.m. Also, special recognition will be given to the Freedom Fighters and/or their families of the Wilcox County Voting Rights Movement during the Mass Meeting.

“We are inviting those far and near to remember the past and celebrate the work of many brave and courageous people,” said Event Organizer Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews. “We want families to come and bring their children. This will be an evening of remembering an honoring those who sacrificed so that others would have a better life.”

On Monday, March 1, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., led a march of 200 Black citizens of Wilcox County from Antioch Baptist Church to the Wilcox County Courthouse demanding the rights to vote. This effort led up to the Bloody Sunday March across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala.

According to the 1965 SCLC publication of Wilcox County, prior to April 1965 there were zero registered black voters despite a 70 percent black majority in Wilcox County. King was informed of this and visited Wilcox County numerous times during 1965-1966.

Camden, the county seat of Wilcox, County was selected by the National Voting Rights Museum to kick off the 45th Anniversary events due to the tremendous number of voting rights activists who lived, worked and marched in their own county for voting rights and school equality. The Freedom Fighters were under constant harassment from law enforcement without federal protection.

This year’s Anniversary March and Mass meeting in Camden will begin the 45th Commemoration of Bloody Sunday, known as the first Selma to Montgomery March. This year’s event will be the Bridge Crossing Jubilee to be held in Selma on Sunday, March 7.

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Civil Rights Veteran Maria Gitin worked in Wilcox County with Voter Registration during the summer of 1965 as part of a Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SCLC, project called SCOPE. She's currently helping to plan this commemorative event.

"We are expecting a large contingent of Wilcox County residents to travel and march in Selma on that Sunday during the Bridge Crossing Jubilee event," said Gitin. "We want everyone to look for banners representing the Wilcox County Freedom Fighters, BAMA Kids and Wilcox County Section of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. We will all march together in Selma to re-create the large group that came from Wilcox County in 1965."

Wilcox County Civil Rights Activists participated by the hundreds in the Selma to Montgomery Marches. Bloody Sunday involved 600 civil rights marchers who were attacked by Alabama State Troopers and other local police, while crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Following the third and final march, which was held without harassment, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Wilcox County is also well-known for its famous Gees Bend quilters, but less known for the sacrifices and contributions made to the Alabama Voting Rights Movement.

"Hopefully, these commemorative events in Camden and Selma will begin to remedy the oversight," Gitin said. "It's imperative that the Freedom Fighters of Wilcox County never be forgotten."

Gitin is also currently completing a memoir and oral history of the voting rights movement in Wilcox County, "This Little Light of Mine, This Bright Light of Ours." To find out more information on Gitin's book, visit her blog at <http://thislitttlelight1965.wordpress.com/>

For more information or to participate in the Wilcox County historic event in Camden, contact Event Organizers Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews at 334-682-5088 or Rosetta Anderson at 334-682-4776.

For a full schedule of Selma's Jubilee weekend schedule and the Bridge Crossing Jubilee event, visit www.selmajubilee.com.