

Ames United Methodist Church

James Roswell Dorsey was baptized a Roman Catholic as an infant and practiced Catholicism until early in his adult life. He knew little about Protestant churches; but, after a little prodding by his wife and a warm welcome at Bel Air's Ames UM Church, he became a member of the congregation. Ros provided many years of diligent and dedicated service as church trustee, choir member, adult Sunday School teacher, and church historian. Due to his outstanding contributions, Ames honored Mr. Dorsey as the first recipient of its George B. Gwynn Christian Service Award in 1983.

Making History

Besides his enjoyment of research into black history, James Dorsey made history of his own on two special occasions. The first came on June 11, 1968, when the United States Army awarded him \$590 for his suggestion on a method to provide faster and more efficient leak detection for cryogenic refrigerators. As a consequence, the government realized tangible savings of \$13,670. The second historical note occurred in 1981 when Governor Harry Hughes appointed James Dorsey to fill a vacancy on the Harford County Property Tax Assessment Appeal Board. Two years later Governor Hughes reappointed Ros to the Board for an additional five years. Dorsey was the first African-American to hold a seat on the board.

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James R. Dorsey's Children

All three of Mr. Dorsey's children are college educated and still living.

James R. Dorsey, Jr. is a retired Baltimore City Fireman and retired State of Maryland correctional facility case worker.

Margaret Dorsey Pagan is a writer and has published, *More Than a Slave* and *The Fulani Girls* (www.margaretpagan.com).

Maurice W. Dorsey, also a writer, has published: *Businessman First Remembering Henry G. Parks, Jr. 1916-1989*, the true story of H. G. Parks Sausage, Inc. (More Park's Sausages mom!) (www.mauricedorsey.com).

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**Bringing Communities
Together Through
Sharing History**

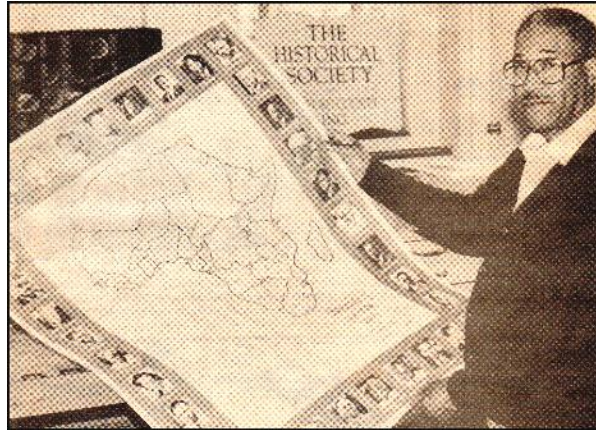
Introduction

James Roswell 'Ros' Dorsey, a native of Baltimore, moved to Edgewood in 1941 with his wife Zelma Curry (1919-2014). Later the couple and their children relocated to Lincoln Road in Hickory. After serving in WW II and retiring from civil service at APG in 1972, Mr. Dorsey became interested in the study of black history. This was a result of the research being done by his daughter, Margaret, into their family's genealogy.

Volunteer & Historian

Due to Ros Dorsey's keen interest in black history and literature, Harford educator Christine Tolbert, a close friend of his daughter, suggested he get in contact with Andrew Bristow, President of the Historical Society of Harford County (HSHC). When the new retiree met Mr. Bristow, he quickly noted that "Andy knew more about black history than me." When Dorsey asked if there was anything he could do to help out the society, Mr. Bristow assigned him to be the curator of the group's expanding map collection and to assist in building a black history and literature collection. Between the two major responsibilities, and other self-initiated projects, "James" Dorsey, as he was known to other volunteers, had enough organizing to do for the Society that it would last the balance of his life.

Every Thursday morning for years, Mr.



James R. Dorsey – Curator of maps for the Harford Historical Society

Dorsey worked quietly and methodically at his duties. He would even return in the evenings to catalogue the growing collection of literature on blacks and other minorities, and to start building a collection of obituaries for local African-Americans.

Ros enjoyed his work at the Historical Society so much he often said he wanted to retire from his other community activities and spend more time studying black history in Harford County. With other historians, Mr. Dorsey published many findings in the *Harford Historical Society Bulletin*, local newspapers, and *Flower of the Forest Black Genealogical Journal*. He set up exhibits on African-American History in the Fellowship Hall at Ames UM Church in Bel Air, the HSHC, Harford Community College, Magnolia Middle School and Harford Mall.

In the early 1990s, working with State Senator William H. Amoss, Dorsey and Christine Tolbert led a successful effort to

secure a \$200,000 grant from the State of Maryland to restore the county's two remaining Civil War era Freedmen's Bureau Schools. Ms. Tolbert headed the 501 (c)(3) non-profit that operated Hosanna School in Berkley, and Mr. Dorsey headed the McComas Institute, a National Register property on Singer Road in the Joppa area. In 2000 the Harford County Historic Preservation Commission honored Ros Dorsey with its Preservationist Honor Award for his many years in promoting the county's African American Heritage.

Other Community Services

In addition to his work on African-American history, Ros Dorsey was active in other endeavors of community service. As a representative for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of Central Consolidated School, he provided testimony to the County Board of Education regarding racial discrimination, including its resistance to fully integrate the student body and failure to promote well qualified black educators to supervisory and administrative positions. In addition, Ros held positions in several other organizations, including: Commander of American Legion Post 55; Vice President of Toastmasters International, Gunpowder Club Number 2562; President of the Ross-Ruff Scholarship Fund 1971-1975; President & Chair of the PTA Scholarship Fund for Central Consolidated School; and member of the local NAACP.