



Alton's Black History: How two early advisers of Dr. King helped establish the Alton NAACP

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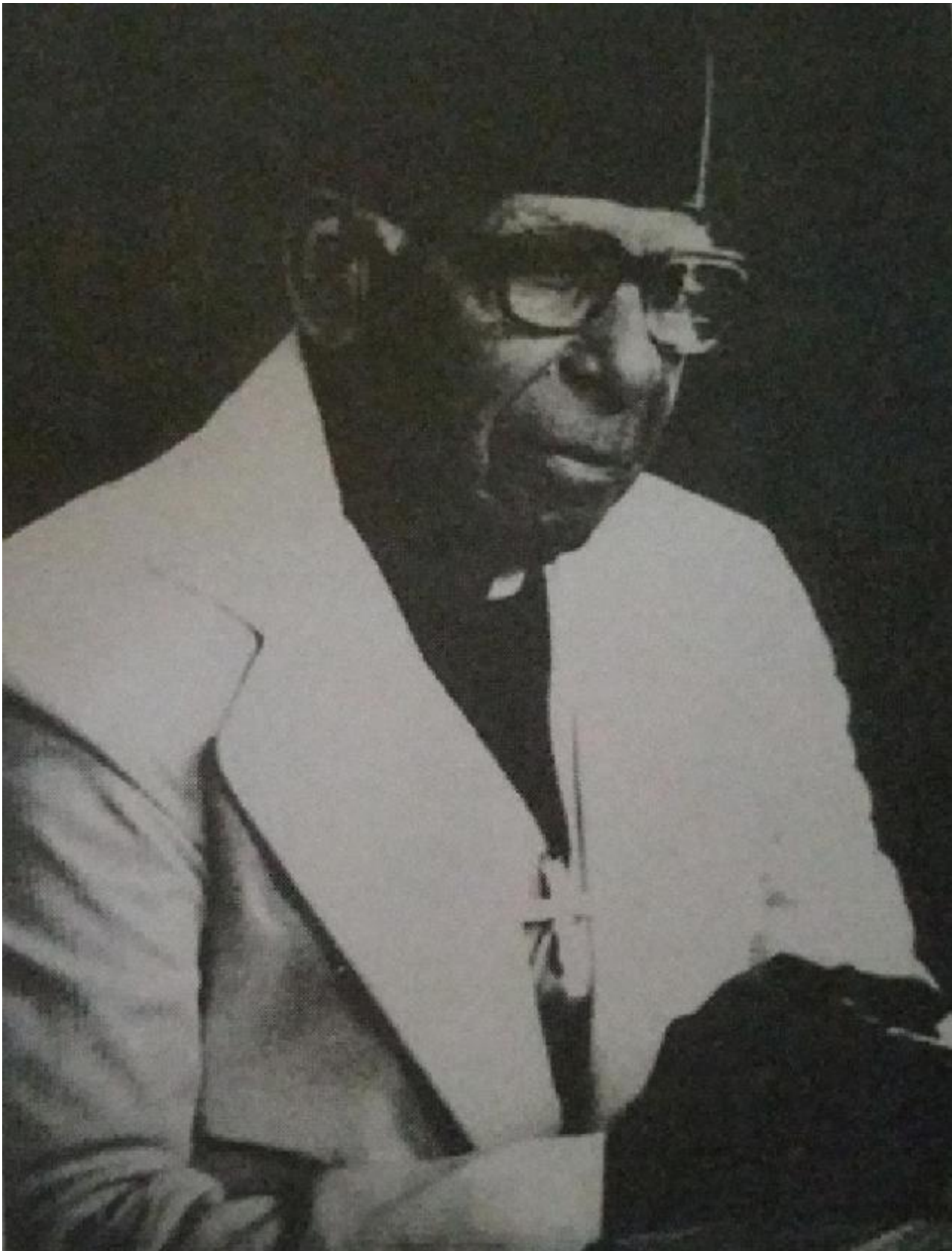
ALTON - The Alton Branch of the NAACP was founded by a group, which included two early advisers to Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Reverend Thomas Wright was born in Forrest City, Arkansas, and received his education in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, before coming to Shurtleff College in Alton to study printing and flower arranging. According to *20th Century African American Leaders in Alton*, a book available at the Alton Museum of History and Art, Rev. Wright worked at Duncan Foundry for 50 years while serving as the pastor for St. John's Baptist Church.

While at the church, Rev. Wright put his formal schooling to use by printing the church programs and a weekly newspaper. He also taught young people how to utilize that printer and how to make concrete blocks. His entry in that book stated Rev. Wright paid children a dime a block for their labor.

In the community, Rev. Wright was incredibly active. He served as the block air-raid warden during World War II, operated a cab service with two drivers, arranged flowers for weddings and funerals, was a member of the Crisis Food Center, Dunbar Masonic Lodge and the YWCA Sr. Citizens.

He also visited many sick people in hospitals, whether or not he knew them, and served at the President of the Alton Ministerial Alliance, which originally obtained the charter for the Alton Branch of the NAACP. Rev. Wright and his friend and fellow minister, Bishop Henry Hamilton Webster, served as early advisers to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Bishop Webster was born in Lebanon, Illinois, and attended school in both the Lebanon and Alton School Systems. Bishop Webster was employed by Owens Illinois Glass Works and the steel works before retiring in 1962 from International Shoe Company, according to *20th Century African American Leaders in Alton*.

He was also the assistant pastor of Highland Avenue Church of God in Christ, before being elevated to pastor in 1928. In 1984, he was appointed Auxillary Bishop of the Illinois Southeast Jurisdiction.

During his time as a minister, Bishop Webster was instrumental in the formation of the Alton Branch of the NAACP on the Alton Ministerial Alliance.

His former church and adjacent street was renamed in his honor in 1976, when it became Webster Temple Church of God in Christ.



One of the first presidents of the Alton Branch of the NAACP was Dr. Roscoe Cruzat. Dr. Cruzat was born in Pascagoula, Mississippi. He attended Alcorn College, Meharry Medical College and Chicago Medical School.

In 1926, Dr. Cruzat moved to Alton with his wife and family, practicing medicine until 1944, when he moved to Chicago.

While in Alton, Dr. Cruzat served as president of the Alton Branch of the NAACP, wrote for the weekly newspaper, *The Question* and served as a member of both The American Medical Association and the National Medical Association as well as the Chicago Medical Society.

His wife, Mary Louise Edwards Cruzat, was born in Pickens, Mississippi, and also attended Alcorn College. She served as both a registered nurse and homemaker.