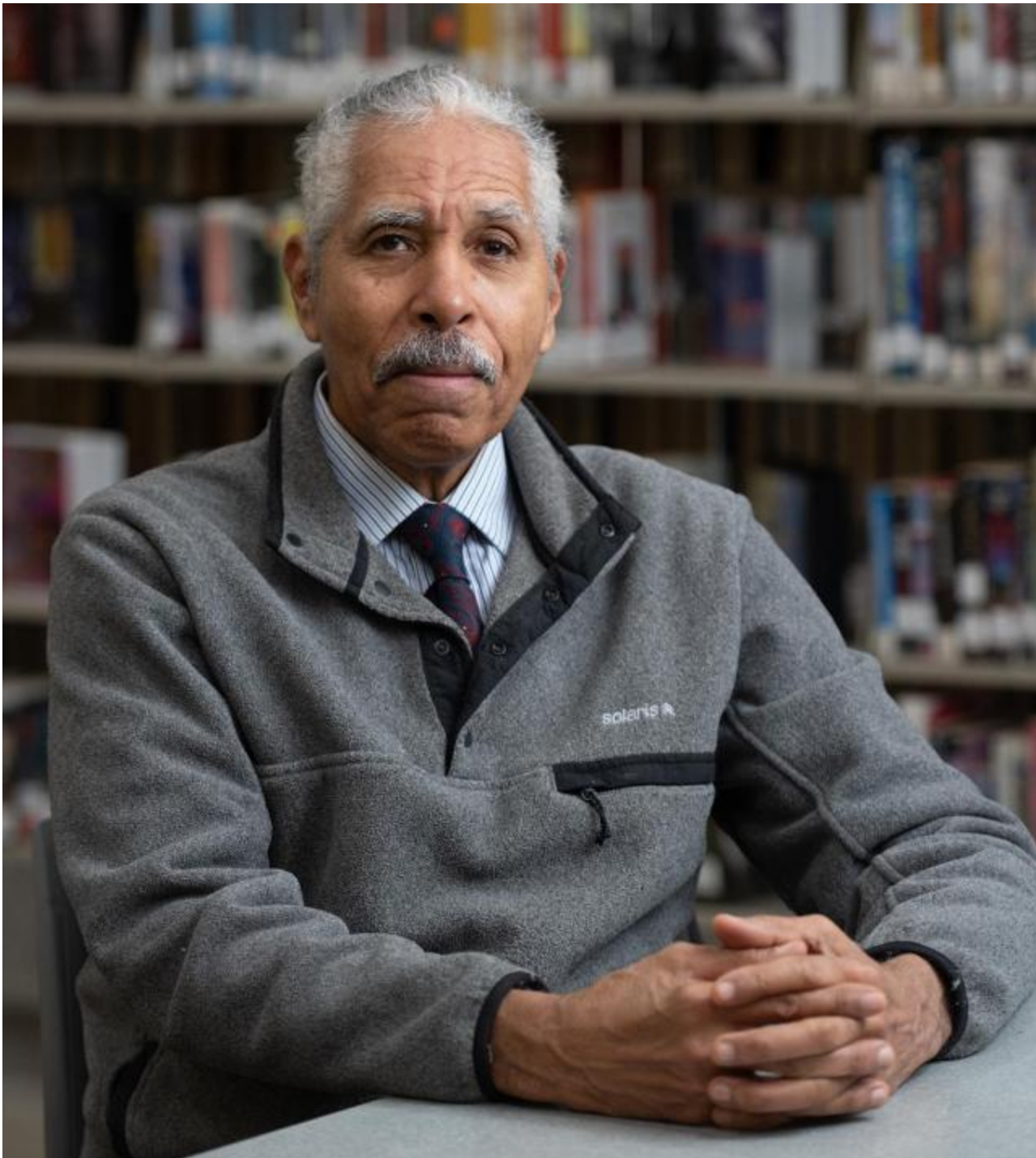




Norman Ross to Share Historical Significance of the Hudlin Family at SIUE's Learning Resource Center

by Patricia Merritt

February 11 2024 7:35 AM



EAST ST. LOUIS – The list of accomplishments and contributions of the Hudin Family from East St. Louis is remarkable. From purchasing their freedom from slavery, to serving as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, to being a tennis coach to the late great Arthur Ashe, to working as Hollywood film producers, the Hudlin family's legacy is rich and substantial.

Norman Ross, retired executive director of the Greater East St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, will reveal interesting, impressive history about the Hudlin side of his family during a presentation at noon Wednesday, Feb. 14 at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Learning Resource Center (LRC).

“We are very proud of some of the accomplishments by our family members within the St. Louis Metropolitan Region,” said Ross, who grew up in East St. Louis. “We feel deeply inspired that they were able to enhance the positive well-being of the total community.”

Ross’s mother is a Hudlin. “I am the oldest son of Dr. Lucille Hudlin-Ross-McClelland, the oldest child and only girl in her immediate Hudlin family of six,” said Ross. “My grandfather Edward W. Hudlin married Myrtle Johnson-Hudlin, and they had six children: Lucille, Warrington, Ervin, Russell, Richard and Edward Hudlin.”

However, Ross begins the history of the Hudlin family with his great-great-great grandmother Sarah Hudlin. Sarah Hudlin had a son, [Peter Hudlin](#), who purchased his freedom in the 1850s, noted Ross, who is the curator for an ancient African history educational mobile exhibit titled: "The Origin and Dynastic Chronology of Ancient Kemet (Egypt).”

Peter Hudlin married Nancy Jane Rutledge, a Cherokee Native American, and they moved to St. Louis in 1855, where Peter Hudlin worked as a freight deliveryman.

“This job position placed him in the perfect situation to work as a conductor on the Underground Railroad to help free slaves on their journey to northern America or Canada,” said Ross. “As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Peter worked with Owen Lovejoy, the great abolitionist minister and brother of the martyred, [Elijah P. Lovejoy](#).”

Peter had two brothers who escaped slavery. Samuel Hudlin fled to Canada and Joseph Hudlin traveled to Chicago, according to Hudlin. Joseph and Peter both worked as conductors on the Underground Railroad run by Owen Lovejoy.

In other family news, Richard A. Hudlin, Ross’s great-grandfather and son of Peter Hudlin, was a graduate of Shurtleff College in Alton and worked as a school principal. He was also a Shakespearean actor, filmmaker and reporter for The St. Louis Globe-Democrat in Missouri and the Westliche Post, a German-language daily newspaper published in St. Louis. Richard Hudlin was also appointed as the postmaster in Clayton, Mo., (1843-1901) by U.S. President William McKinley, Jr.

Ross learned several things about his grandfather, Edward Hudlin, who was the son of Richard A. Hudlin. Edward was a famous horse jockey on the Frank James Farm and Ranch in Missouri. (Frank James was the brother of Jessie James.) While Edward was a soldier in France during World War I, he learned the French-style of stone masonry. When he returned to the U.S., he began his career as a stone mason, according to Ross.

“All stone-built homes, businesses, porches and fences with French-style green mortar trim around each stone in the East St. Louis area were built by my grandfather and his sons,” noted Ross.

Edward Hudlin’s brother, Richard ‘Dick’ Hudlin, was a teacher at Sumner High School in St. Louis. He was also the tennis tutor of Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson. Ashe won three Grand Slam single titles (U.S. Open in 1968, Australia Open in 1970 and Wimbledon in 1975). He was the only Black man ever to win those titles. Gibson won three Grand Slam single titles (French Open in 1956, Wimbledon in 1957 and 1958, and the U.S. Open in 1957 and 1958). She was one of the first Black athletes to cross the color line in international tennis.

The women in the Hudlin family also did great things, according to Ross. “For instance, my mother, [Dr. Lucille Hudlin-Ross-McClelland](#), as dean of the SIUE Nursing School, was critical in getting the nursing program accredited at the University,” he said.

“My grandmother, Myrtle Johnson-Hudlin, was a St. Louis elementary school teacher who was attending Stowe College in St. Louis when she married my grandfather, Edward W. Hudlin,” Ross continued. “My great grandmother, Lucille Johnson-McCorkle (on my grandmother’s side of the family) was born a slave 10 years before the Civil War ended. In her last years, she lived with my grandparents in Centreville and taught Sunday School for me and other neighborhood children.”

Other notables that Ross will share during his presentation include:

- Warrington Hudlin, founder and owner of Hudlin Insurance Company in East St. Louis
- Ervin Hudlin, lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and a green beret during the Vietnam War
- Russell Hudlin, owner of two drug stores in the East St. Louis area
- Dr. Edward Hudlin Jr., professor of philosophy at Harvard and SIUE
- Richard Hudlin Jr., Illinois circuit judge for St. Clair County
- [Reginald Hudlin](#) and [Warrington Hudlin Jr.](#) (The Hudlin Brothers), major Hollywood film directors, producers and media managers; some of the films they produced include the 1990s films, “House Party,” “Bebe’s Kids” and “Ride,” and later “Boomerang,” “The Great White Hype” and “Marshall.”

Ross received his bachelor's in biology from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He worked in East St. Louis as the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce from 1986-2011. He currently lives in St. Louis.

"I enjoy history and love sharing it," said Ross. "It is vital that we preserve and tell the important history and contributions of African Americans in East St. Louis and around the world!"

"I've had the pleasure of working with Mr. Norman Ross for programming at the LRC in the past, and each time we meet, I am appreciative of being in his presence," said LRC Program Coordinator Danayka Saavedra Berrocal. "He has a wealth of knowledge of the area and its history, and shares it freely. The LRC is honored to welcome Mr. Ross back on the Wyvetter H. Younge Higher Education Campus."

The [SIUE East St. Louis Learning Resource Center \(LRC\)](#) is a full-service library available to the East St. Louis and surrounding communities, as well as the SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School, SIUE East St. Louis Center staff and programs and other programs and employees on the Wyvetter H. Younge Higher Education Campus. It offers internet access with 10 public computers, a computer lab with 20 computers and a SMART Board available to on-campus classes and community groups. Career services, free library cards, free printing, copying, scanning, faxing, and Notary Public services are designed to provide inclusive access and assistance in one convenient location. LRC is sponsored by a grant from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB).