

Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Association (LIALA)

History

Interscholastic activities among colored schools in Louisiana date beyond the founding of the state supported Negro school, Southern University in 1879 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In the Northern section of the State, Shreveport Colored High School had a football team as early as 1920. Colman College, Crowley, Howe Institute, Kentwood McKinley, Minden, Monroe and Rayne were other schools outside of New Orleans that made a name in athletics in the early period.

Prior to 1935, Louisiana did not have an organized state program of interscholastic activities for its Negro high school boys and girls. The *first* successful effort at an organization was attempted around 1928 in Vidalia, Tallulah, Lake Providence, Ferriday, Winnsboro, St. Joseph, Sicily Island, Delta BrLidge, Waterproof section. *Ruffin Paul* and *A. H. Jackson* were the guiding spirits in the organization. In 1934, Professor Paul went to DeRidder as principal and immediately transplanted the idea of building a conference around teams from Natchitoches, Many, Mansfield, DeRidder, Leesville, Elizabeth, Oakdale and Alexandria. Thus Louisiana had two athletic and literary organizations.

Interscholastic activity for Louisiana's colored youth culminating in a State Rally for Negro boys and girls, held annually at Southern University and A&M College, like its counterpart, the State Rally for white boys and girls, held annually at Louisiana State University, was another of the fulfilled dreams of the late *Dr. Joseph Samuel Clark*, during his tenure as President of Southern University.

In 1935, *Dr. William H. Gray, Jr.*, a member of the faculty of the Division of Extended Services at Southern University and former Bluefield State College athlete, became attached to the individual efforts to organize and promote Negro High School Interscholastic Activity, serving as general adviser to literary and scholastic programs throughout the state. Later upon his suggestion and direction, teams from each of the two organized districts, St. Joseph from the Northeast and Many from the Northwest, met at the Peabody High School in Alexandria in **March, 1936** (Alexandria being the only Colored School in the State with an indoor basketball court) to play for a "State Title". Crowley High played Alexandria on the same evening to give the occasion the semblance of a tournament. *M.F. Fortson, E.E. Green, David May, Rev. H.C. Ross, Ruffin Paul, Clifton Weil, J.B. Lafargue, Henry Faulk, Earl Maxie, Malcolm Laguard, Archie Epps, J.D. Davis, Texia Grizzel* and *Maria L.B. Lawson* were only a few of the people aiding Dr. Gray in making this effort worthwhile.

Since the only competitive activity of that day was basketball, it was but logical that it would be the springboard. Dr. Gray, himself, was quite an extraordinary basketball player in his undergraduate days at Bluefield State College. Under his direction, there was held the first basketball tournament which assumed non-provincial proportions. The only "auditorium-gymnasium" in the state, at that time, was at Peabody High School in Alexandria, and because of this Dr. Gray proposed that the program be held there.

Dr. Joseph S. Clark had been reassured of the soundness of his original idea for a Negro state program; virtually every other concerned Negro organization and enterprise had enthusiastically shared the same views. The Negro State Teachers' Association, then preside over by Professor Cornelius King, the Division of Health and Safety Education of the State Department of Education, headed by Mr. Jess W. Hair, the Negro newspapers, including the Shreveport Sun, the Chicago Defender, the Louisiana Weekly, the Pittsburgh Courier; their writers and editors, including, *Mr. Sherman Briscoe, Mr. J.D. Davis, Mr. O.C.W. Taylor, Mr. Eddie Burbridge, and Mr. M.L. Collins*; these were among the many who lauded the effort and who encourage Dr. Gray and President Clark to continue the effort.

A key individual in coordinating all of these activities was Mr. John W. Fisher of Southern University, after studying at the Land Grant College of Iowa in 1934, where he had seen in action the kind of program, being envisioned for Negro boys and girls in Louisiana was convinced of his idea of an official State sponsored rally for Negro youth that Dr. Joseph S. Clark authorized him, Dr. Gray, and the Dean of Southern University, Dr. Felton G. Clark, to make trips to several Negro Land Grant and white Land Grant Colleges where institutions were already having state rallies. These gentlemen were particularly impressed with the program at Virginia State College and at Prairie View College, among the Negro institutions, and right at Louisiana State University, with reference to the program for white youth. They reported their impression in an historic meeting, at which were present: Messrs, *David L. May, Ralph Metcalfe, Arnette W. Mumford, J. L. Kraft, A. C. Priestly, R. U. Clark, J. L. Jones, A. L. Jordan, Henry Carroll, John Kermit Haynes, A. H. Dillon, Hayward Jackson, E. B. Miller, Moses Wright, L. F. Garrett, Ben Cavit, and Cornelius King.* It was at this time that the organization was formally created, which at that time grew into a well-established **Louisiana Interscholastic and Literary Association.** Dr. William Gray was chosen as the *first* formal head and remained so until he left Southern University to become President of Florida A&M College (University).

Dr. Joseph S. Clark had experienced more than normal difficulty in getting State approval for the entire program, that is a State Rally for Negro boys and girls similar to the one held at Louisiana State University for other boys and girls. With the support of the Negro groups, and with the “winning over” of key officials and persons, the way was finally paved for the State Board of Education to approve and make official the State Rally for Negro boys and girls to be held annually on the campus of Southern University, the Negro Land Grant College. The historic date of the approval by the State Board of Education was **June 12, 1937.**

The Board took a forward step on this because involved was a commitment to spend hundreds of dollars for trophies and awards for outstanding boys and girls; housing and feeding thousands plus building facilities to carry on a host of literary and athletic events simultaneously; to release the faculty members of Southern University to organize an almost limitless number of groups in the state to compete for excellence in the various fields of music, literary activities, are—in all its established forms—science, and athletics, plus, those which practicality dictates should be added with time; to provide the “know how” that would ensure that the bases of competition established are those that will be consistent with world standards, academically and otherwise, so that a boy or girl who is judged “excellent” would not be embarrassed by comparisons elsewhere.

From a dual beginning all of the educational forces of the State have combined. The Teachers’ Association, under the progress newspapers continued to encourage the program; competent and interested men have been elected to offices; Xavier, Dillard, and the Louisiana Rural Normal School are lending their influence to the program—and the Southern University Rally Has Become a Reality.

Bulletin Southern University and A&M College. **The Southern University Rally and Tournaments of The Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Association.** Volume 1, January, 1938. Number 1. Southern University and A&M College, Archives and Manuscripts Department, John B. Cade Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Louisiana Interscholastic Athletics & Literary Association. **Eighteenth Annual State High School Rally.** Southern University and A&M College, Archives and Manuscripts Department, John B. Cade Library Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

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LIALO Recognition Project : Good Read

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Efforts underway for recognition of LIALO, a Black athletic association

19th October 2015 · 0 Comments

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By Ryan Whirty

Contributing Writer

How do you preserve the heritage, memory and legacy of a vital, historic, ground-breaking organization when few people even remember it?

You keep your head down and stay on course with your mission.

That's what Dr. Kirk Marshall Clayton is trying to do as he pushes numerous state historical entities to recognize and honor the long-gone Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Organization (LIALO), the institution that, before the era of integration, oversaw and administered African-American high school athletics.

"I'm trying to be a spark that ignites things," Clayton said. "This is a part of Louisiana history, but it's been forgotten." Clayton knows what he's talking about — as a 1965 graduate of Scotlandville High School in Baton Rouge, he competed in the LIALO as a track and field standout who helped guide the school to a state track championship while setting the national prep record in the 100 meters as an individual and winning multiple state and national sprinting honors.

Clayton says that while he himself has been honored for his achievements by several organizations — such as the **Sugar Bowl's Greater New Orleans Sports Hall of Fame (GNOSHOF)**, which inducted him in 1996 — the LIALO as an organization remains largely overlooked by historians and sports fans in the state.

"I'm doing this so that not only I, but an entire organization that did so much for so many at a time when sports were still segregated but when we were still doing so many great things," he said.

The LIALO existed for decades before the tide of integration caused it to be merged into and absorbed by Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA) in 1969. However, Clayton said that while the structure of the LIALO **shifted, the organization's records** — and therefore much of its heritage — **to a large extent weren't preserved and transferred** in the process of the merger with the LHSSA.

Neither, Clayton said, have the LIALO as an entity and its former member high schools been memorialized in any of **the state's historical museums and halls of fame.**

Not a banner, not a plaque, not anything.

And that's what he hopes to change. Clayton — who now lives and works as a school teacher in California after starring in track at and graduating from San Jose State University — said he sent more than two dozen letters of inquiry to the LHSAA and other entities in the state that are involved with historical preservation.

Some, like the GNOSHOF, have been very receptive, he said. Sugar Bowl and GNOSHOF spokesman John Sudsbury **said last week that the hall of fame's board expressed great enthusiasm to at least seriously mull over Clayton's** petition on behalf of the LIALO to do something to recognize the high school organization and its history.

While Sugar Bowl spokesman **John Sudsbury said the GNOSHOF board won't get down to business for its 2016** ceremony until after the current football season ends in January, he added that the hall committee certainly is **considering Clayton's petition on its agenda.**

"We're definitely going to review it and see if we can find [an action] that makes sense," Sudsbury said. **"Our organization likes it a lot, and we have different options for it."**

Sudsbury also lauded Clayton for his efforts to recognize the LIALO.

"It's definitely an interesting thing," he said, **"and it's a cool thing that Mr. Clayton is doing."**

However, Clayton said that the Sugar Bowl has depressingly been in the minority when it comes to receiving **responses from the organizations he contacted. Many of the entities didn't** respond at all, and some, like the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation (LTHP) and even the Louisiana Black Publishers Association, said they had no inclination to work with him.

"[The LTHP] gave me a flat-out no," he said. **"It was matter-of-fact. They said they have no interest in something like that."**

LTHP administrator Sherry McInnis could not be reached for comment.

But despite such setbacks, Clayton said he's steadfast in his mission to promote, preserve and advocate for the legacy of the LIALO.

"Nobody did more than [the LIALO] for an entire race of people," he said. **"When I ask for something like this, I'm not asking for money. I'm trying to get all these halls of fame to get something in there on the LIALO and all the schools that were a part of it and the people who did it. I'm not going to stop."**

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