**Joseph E. Lewis**

Joe Lewis was born in 1930 in Sabina, Ohio, Lewis, where his family at different points lived on farms they rented, in town in their own home, and then on a small farm they owned on the edge of Sabina. They raised chickens during the World War II years which were popular during the era of meat rationing. Lewis attended public schools in Sabina, played and played the cornet in the band. He represented the school at Wilmington College in competitions for Chemistry, Biology, and American History.

After graduating from high school in 1949, Lewis worked in a tool factory to raise money to go to college. The following year the Korean War started. A classmate, Rod Tillis who had recently received his pilot’s license, gave him an airplane ride which led him to become interested in flying (Lewis had been reading about the new radar systems being developed). Even though he had already enrolled at Ohio State to attend in the fall of 1950, they both decided to enlist in the Air Force which had been established in 1947. He scored well on the science and math tests and was placed in a career field of electronics and radar. The Korean War was underway and Joe was trained as a radar technician in Mississippi. He worked on radar and was sent to school in Mississippi to get training on the Doppler radar system. He experienced racial segregation off base on buses and in theaters. One day as his assignment was ending he decided that he would ride in the front of a bus, and took a seat behind the bus driver. When his stop came, the driver informed him that he was not supposed to ride up front. He replied “as long as I’m in uniform on and pay twenty-five cents, I’ll sit any damn where I want to ride.” He noted that the driver was upset, but because he was getting off, nothing was done. Lewis was assigned to an air rescue squadron based in Japan, and maintaining radar on planes in Korea where picking up downed airmen with planes with nonworking radar. He would fly to Korea, fix the radar, and return to base in Japan.

After a four-year tour, he left the service and returned to the states, where he worked as a civilian for the Air Force, initially at Dayton Air Force Depot, which was aligned with Wright Patterson Air Force base. He worked on radar, radio and test equipment at this major air force depot. He had an opportunity to obtain training on the new Doppler radar system. Before entering the service Lewis met Frances Atchinsonwho had attended school at nearby Leesburg, Ohio and afterward lived with her parents in Washington Courthouse where she worked as a surgical technician at Payne Memorial Hospital. They corresponded while he was in the service, and when he returned they continued their courtship and were married in 1956 and lived in Dayton for seven years. where their three children, Lorraine, Joe, and [**need your youngest daughter’s name**] \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ were born.

The Depot was eventually phased out and Lewis’s job was moved to Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Fairborn, Ohio. Interested in avoiding a long daily commute from Dayton to Fairborn, and interested in living in the small time environment in which both had grown up, in 1963 the Lewises decided to move to Yellow Springs, twelve miles from Wright Patterson. As electronic technician jobs at Wright Patterson opened up he became a specialist on electronic components as part of supplying the needs on the base and across the country and sometimes outside the country. As the process was mechanized and computerized, the technicians would developing coding sheets related to the parts, as well as replace parts, and these items were input into the first generation of IBM computers for use throughout the Air Force system. He was trained for computer programming and system analysis writing computer programming code, and became proficient in the area of supply and maintenance. He retired from Wright Patterson in 1986, and worked for a government contractors for approximately eight additional years.

When the Lewises moved to Yellow Springs they transferred their church membership from Greater Allen African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Dayton to Central Chapel AME Church in Yellow Springs. Joe Lewis eventually became Treasurer of the church, and a Trustee. Under the pastorate of Rev. Harold Brown, the church began fundraising to build a new church. The new building was completed in 1972. The church grew and in the 1990s under pastor Rev. John Freeman an Education and Family Life edition was added, when Lewis was had returned to the Trustee Board.

He was appointed to a seat on the Village Council in 1991 to complete the term of a Council member whose new job would have been a conflict with council duties. Lewis was then elected to the council and remained until 1999, eventually served as President, and as Vice President. During his tenure the bike path was built in Yellow Springs, Council played a role in ameliorating chemical waste found near the Vernay factory on Dayton Street, and the pending sale of the Whitehall Farm led to a plan to preserve the land as farm land through the Tecumseh Land Trust

*Kevin McGruder*

Sources: WYSO Civil Rights Oral History Project, Interview of Joe Lewis by Kevin McGruder, February 22, 2017; Central Chapel AME Church 130th Anniversary Program, May, 1996;

Central Chapel AME Church 140th Anniversary Program, 2006