

LIVING HISTORY



Annie and Simeon Wright of Countryside, Ill.



State Rep. Eddie Armstrong III with Sherra Dunklin



Carlene Akins and Crystal Mercer

# Captivating evening

*Cousin of slain civil rights icon retells kidnapping story*



Jill Bayles and Jay Hedges with library director Jeff Baskin



Mary Lee Saunders-Fray, Kevin Hunt and state Sen. Joyce Elliott



Pamela and the Rev. Bobby Acklin with Mable Bynum



Roosevelt Simmons Jr. (center) with daughters Raven and Rachel Simmons



Elisabeth Bates, Hank Bates, Jessie Bates and Barbara Miles

Nearly 300 people turned out to see civil rights figure and author Simeon Wright, cousin of slain Chicago teen Emmett Till, during his appearance Feb. 1 at William F. Laman Public Library in North Little Rock. A catered dinner of barbecued beef brisket and pork; baked beans; potato salad; and fried pies was provided by Lindsey's Hospitality House. Copies of Wright's book, *Simeon's Story: An Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of Emmett Till* (Chicago Review Press; \$12.95), were available for purchase and signing.

In 1955, 12-year-old Simeon was sleeping in the same bed with Emmett in the Wrights' home in Money, Miss., when Emmett was kidnapped — and subsequently tortured and murdered — for whistling at a white woman at a store. The crime drew national attention to the plight of blacks in the Jim Crow-segregated South and, as the

book's description suggests, "became the catalyst for the civil rights movement."

Introduced by state Rep. Eddie Armstrong III of North Little Rock, Wright spoke fondly of his cousin as a young man who was "inquisitive," "fun to be around" and "felt that everyone was happy just like he was."

"But he arrived in Mississippi at a bad time," Wright continued, recounting the event and his family's struggle to come to grips with the tragedy.

After Wright's speech, he was presented with an Arkansas Traveler certificate by library director Jeff Baskin.

Wright's visit was in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities' traveling exhibit, "For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights," which is at the library through March 16.

— Story and photos by Helaine R. Williams

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