

Oakwood memorial rites honor longtime professor

Body of Dr. Eva Dykes is moved to new campus cemetery

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A little history was made — and great history celebrated — Tuesday morning as Oakwood College honored the late Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes at her new resting place, Oakwood Memorial Gardens.

During a memorial service at Oakwood College Church, Provost Mervyn A. Warren reminded the 200 or so students gathered that the college's library is named for Dykes.

Most of the buildings on campus are named for someone, he

said. "We want you to recognize that behind each name is a story," Warren said.

Dykes was the first black woman in the United States to earn a doctorate in philosophy, at Radcliffe College in 1921.

She also attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. That's where she was teaching in 1944 when she decided to come to Huntsville and chair Oakwood's English Department and Division of Humanities.

She was the first — and for more than a decade the only — Ph.D. on the Oakwood faculty.

Her willingness to leave prestigious Howard University for the then-unknown Seventh-day Adventist school was a milestone in Oakwood's move to be-

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Oakwood College faculty and students gather Tuesday to honor the late Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes at her new resting place, Oakwood Memorial Gardens.

Oakwood College honors life of late English Department chair

Rites

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come accredited.

When Dykes died in 1986 at age 93, she had been a teacher for more than 50 years, 27 of those at Oakwood. She was buried in a cemetery on Jordan Lane.

Last week, Dykes' body was moved to Oakwood Memorial Gardens, which opened last spring.

The alumni cemetery sits off Wynn Drive along the campus' southern boundary, just a few yards from a slave cemetery discovered six years ago. The slave cemetery dates back to the days when a plantation sat on what's now the Oakwood campus.

If there was going to be an Oakwood Memorial Gardens, Warren said, Dykes' grave had to be in it.

"Her life was a life worthy of note, worthy of respect, of hon-

or," Minneola Dixon, Oakwood's archivist, said Tuesday. Dixon said she gets tremendous pleasure caring for her former teacher's many writings, degrees and honors.

Among her accomplishments: She graduated summa cum laude from Howard; wrote several books, including "The Negro in English Romantic Thought"; founded and named Oakwood's Aeolians chorale; and in 1975 was recognized at a Seventh-day Adventists conference in Vienna, Austria, for her contributions to Christian education.

The crowd at the cemeteries also marked a bit of living history Tuesday, officially unveiling street signs proclaiming the road to Oakwood Memorial Gardens "H.L. Cleveland Way."

Cleveland and his wife, Elizabeth, both Oakwood graduates and on hand for the occasion, were recognized for their support of the college and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Cleveland is a longtime minis-

ter who also served as an administrator in church conferences. Elizabeth Cleveland has been a teacher as well as an assistant in her husband's pastoral work.

The Clevelands' daughter, attorney Denise Cleveland Leggett of Duluth, Ga., and her husband, Dr. Christopher Leggett, donated an unspecified amount of money to help establish Oakwood Memorial Gardens.

In the chapel, Oakwood President Delbert Baker tied Tuesday's events to the college's Black History Month activities.

"We are blessed today to recognize some of those individuals who are part of our history right here at Oakwood College," Baker said.

Only a fourth of the students at the chapel service made it to Dykes' grave Tuesday morning. They had other things to do, thanks in part to the woman they honored.