

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Lee

PERSON

Lee, William, H., 1936 -

Alternative Names: William Lee;

Life Dates: May 29, 1936-September 22, 2019

Place of Birth: Austin, Texas, USA

Residence: Sacramento, CA

Work: Sacramento, CA

Occupations: Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Newspaper publisher William H. Lee was born on May 29, 1936 in Austin, Texas. Williams attended Sacramento State College from 1953 to 1955, and went on to earn his A.B. degree in journalism from the University of California in 1957.

From 1959 to 1965, Lee served in the U.S. Air Force. Lee, along with radioman Glinio Gladden and businessman John W. Cole, founded the Sacramento Observer on November 22, 1962. Despite early challenges, Lee became president and sole publisher of the paper in 1965. At that time, he also founded Lee Publishing, Col. Five years later, under his leadership, the Sacramento Observer was named the number one African American newspaper in the United States. Throughout the years, the Sacramento Observer has been a strong community leader and was the catalyst for organizing the local chapter of the National Urban League. In the past TheSacramento Observer has sponsored numerous community events including organizing the annual Sacramento Black Expo to celebrate African American history featuring seminars, workshops, concerts and a marketplace.

In 2001, a year after Lee appointed his late wife Kathryn Lee, as co-publisher, the newspaper launched an online news site, SacObserver.com. Its first inception featured select articles from The Sacramento Observer newspaper. Lee's youngest son, Lawrence Charles Lee, served as the president and CEO of SacObserver.com. Then, in 2005, executive and publishing control of the Sacramento Observer passed from Lee and his wife to his son Lawrence Charles Lee, who now is the sole publisher, president, general manager of the Sacramento Observer and Lee Publishing, Co.

From 1970 to 1973, Lee served as secretary and as a member of the board of directors of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. He was elected as president of the West Coast Black Publishers Association 1974. He is founder and past president of the Men's Civic League of Sacramento, co-founder of the Sacramento Area Black Caucus, and is a lifetime member of the N.A.A.C.P.

Lee received Sacramento's Outstanding Young Man of the Year Award (1965), the Carly Murphy Plaque for community service (1994), the The Sacramento Observer was a recipient of the Media Award from the Western Regional Conference of Elected Black Officials in (1973) and the John B. Russwurm Trophy – which is considered to be the Pulitzer Prize in African American newspaper publishing – from the National Newspaper Publishers Association (1973, 1975).

Lee and his late wife Kathryn Lee, have three sons: Lawrence Charles, William Hanford, Jr., and Roderick Joseph (deceased).

William H. Lee was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 5, 2013.

Lee passed away on September 22, 2019.

Related Entries

Roosevelt Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Grant Union High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

H.S.

Raphael Weill Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

California State University, Sacramento [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of California, Berkeley [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

A.B.

[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

The Sacramento Observer [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1962 to 1965]

Founder

The Sacramento Observer [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1965 to 2005]

Publisher/President/CEO

Sacramento Area Black Caucus [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Co-Founder

Men's Civic League of Sacramento [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Founder/Past President

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Life Member

National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) [MEMBEROF]

[from 1970 to 1973]

Secretary/Member, Board of Directors

West Coast Publishers Association [MEMBEROF]

[from 1974 to ?]

President