

Guide to the Ithaca's Martin Luther King Jr. Associations Records

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Ithacans were among the more than 6 million petitioners who asked the federal government to declare Martin Luther King Jr's birthday a national holiday, in tribute to the slain leader's nonviolent campaign for human rights and against racism. By the time the holiday was first observed nationally in 1986, 18 years after his death, Ithaca and many other communities were already holding annual birthday celebrations. In 1982 an Ithaca celebration committee took observances a step further, by founding the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Fund of Ithaca, N.Y.

The new group and its board of directors enlisted volunteers from local business, industry, education, religious and fraternal organizations. The initial plan was to choose two junior-senior high school students per year to send to a five-day workshop in Atlanta, at the MLK Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Later other age groups would be added, other types of recognition were planned, and workshops would be held to pass along knowledge and experience. Then for six years, the Fund organized oratory contests for several age levels, which served to explore and publicize MLKing's ideals. Finally "Freedom Rides" by bus to Atlanta were co-sponsored for weeklong summer training programs.

No wonder the Scholarship Fund voted to change its name to the Martin Luther King Jr. Association for Education and Social Change. These files suggest the amounts of time, energy and funds needed to carry out this ambitious agenda were prodigious, but the Ithaca community owed much to the participants for exploring methods and devices on the continuing route toward social change.

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