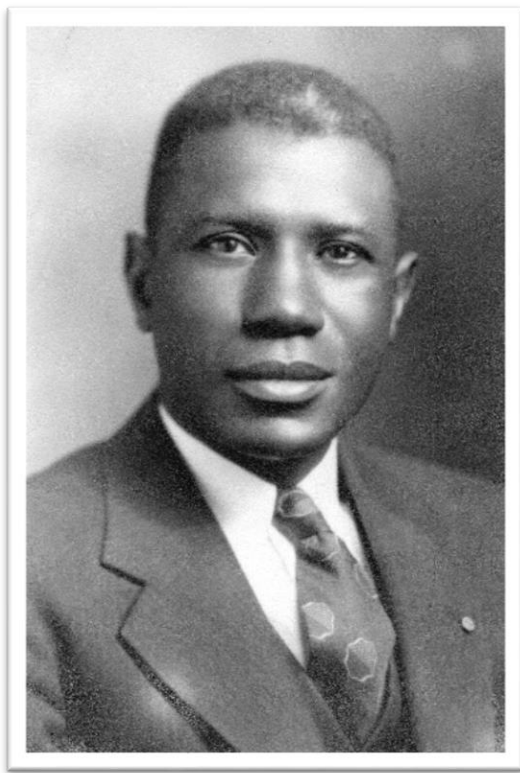


Fairport Rotary Speaker Urged MLK to Choose Rochester

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

The October 7, 1937 issue of the Fairport Herald-Mail told of a special event for the Fairport Rotary Club. The newspaper's headline proclaimed, "First Negro Rotary Speaker", something that had not occurred in Fairport Rotary's short eleven-year history. Fairport High School Principal Andrew Lynch, a young man just thirty years old, was President of Fairport Rotary at the time, and extended an invitation to Lucius M. Tobin to speak to the group. Tobin, 39 years of age, was a native of Greenville, South Carolina. He had graduated from Virginia Union University in 1923, where he was valedictorian of his class, then completed the requirements for a Master's Degree in Sociology from the University of Michigan in 1928.



*Reverend Lucius M.
Tobin addressed
Fairport Rotary in
October of 1937.*

Lucius Tobin was pursuing a theology degree at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School when he was asked to speak to the Fairport Rotary Club. Another alumni of the school, Reverend Stanley E. Smith of Raymond Baptist Church, provided the introduction of Tobin, stating, "In Rotary, there

are no lines of demarcation, whether national, religious, or racial. Through its influence great strides are being made to bring about a better understanding among the peoples on earth.”

As part of his discussion at Fairport Rotary, Tobin spoke of the historic contributions of blacks to American culture, his comments reaching back to the years of slavery. He included in his discussion the topics of labor in the production of tobacco, cotton, rice and sugar, and the establishment of schools for blacks, “...since there were no schools for Negroes in the South before the Civil War, the Negroes established their first schools.” Music and melody were also identified by Tobin as a substantial contribution to American culture. Lastly, Tobin pointed to the cultural importance of religion, and pointed out that “the negro had a church before he had a home.”

Lucius M. Tobin became pastor of Atlanta’s Providence Baptist Church and was among the faculty of the religion and philosophy department at Morehouse College of the same city. A young student, a friend of the Tobin family, enrolled at Morehouse in September of 1944. Upon his graduation in 1948, Lucius Tobin wrote a letter of recommendation for the young man – his name was Martin Luther King Jr. - to Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania. In his letter, Tobin noted, “I tried to persuade him to enter Colgate-Rochester, my school.”

Our local history would have a few more chapters if Fairport Rotary presenter Lucius Tobin, friend and mentor of Martin Luther King Jr., had successfully convinced the future civil rights icon to attend Colgate-Rochester Divinity School.

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