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ARCHIVE

Minnie Langley, Rosewood survivor and fighter

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One of the oldest survivors of the 1923 Rosewood massacre and a leader in winning restitution for the destruction of the black settlement by a white mob died Saturday.

Minnie Lee Langley, 82, of Jacksonville, underwent surgery Tuesday for cancer, said her granddaughter Frankie Russell.

Langley was one of nine elderly Rosewood survivors who each received \$150,000 earlier this year following state Legislature approval of a \$2-million compensation plan in 1994.

Officials are reviewing the names of more than 100 descendants who may also receive shares of the money.

The state acknowledged it failed to protect the families who fled from a white mob that wiped out Rosewood.

The black community of about 350 was near Cedar Key, on the Gulf Coast 100 miles north of Tampa Bay. Today all that remains is a small road sign and one house six miles east of Cedar Key.

Langley was there during the rampage, fleeing her aunt's home as a 9-year-old and hiding in nearby woods.

She also was present in May 1994 when Gov. Lawton Chiles signed into law a plan to compensate survivors, lifting what he described as a "shadow of shame" over the state.

"I never lost my faith," Langley said at the signing ceremony. "It's been a long way to go."

"This is a great loss for us," Arnett Doctor, a spokesman for the Rosewood survivors and their families, said Sunday. "It's devastating, especially to me and my family."

Doctor was a distant cousin to Langley, who was a member of the Carrier family, one of the prominent families in Rosewood.

Langley and her cousin, Ruth Davis of Miami, initially asked lawmakers for compensation and a memorial for Rosewood victims in 1993. After a study, a compensation bill was passed near the end of the 1994 legislative session.

Langley offered vivid testimony about the violence that erupted on New Year's Day 1923 as a group of whites went on a fruitless search for a black man accused of assaulting a white woman. At least six blacks and two whites were killed; the mob destroyed almost every home and building over the next few days.

Langley said she was at the home of her uncle, Sylvester Carrier, when the mob came. The children fled through the back door in their night clothes and hid in the woods before finally catching a train to Gainesville, she said.

"We stayed out there three days and three nights in the woods," said Langley. "They built a little bitty fire. We were hiding. We didn't have clothes. They covered us with weeds and stuff."

Langley moved to Jacksonville in 1926 and spent her life making brushes and brooms. Doctor said the money from the Rosewood compensation provided her with some satisfaction.

"She has realized a sense of closure on it," said Doctor. "She had said the money paid by the state was not sufficient, but she felt good the state had paid them something."

Russell said Langley spent some of the money on "little things that many people might consider mundane, a new sofa . . . more than opulence."

"She certainly had a lot of family around her," her granddaughter said. "That was what she valued."