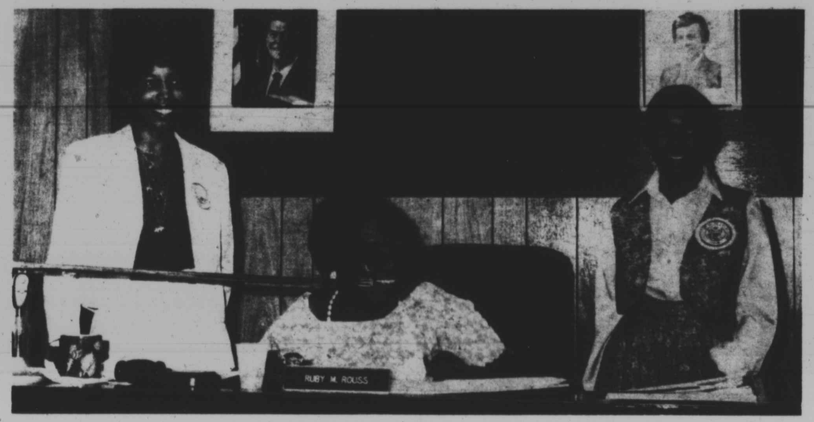
PEOPLE AT WORK:



V.I. Senate President Ruby M. Rouss with legislative pages.

One of the highest ranking female elected officials in the world, she is president of the Senate of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

She Heads V.I. Lawmakers

Mention the name Ruby Rouss in the U. S. Virgin Islands, and you will get an immediate reaction—oftimes negative, sometimes positive—but a reaction.

She is a senator to the 14th legislatureof the Islands, and has served as President of the Legislature, a first for a black woman anywhere in the United States or its territories.

In fact, she has an incredible list of "firsts."

In 1943, she was the first Virgin Islander to enlist in the Women's Army Corps where she rose to Master Sergeant.

She served on the staff of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander and was the first black woman to be assigned to SHAPE headquarters in Paris.

She was the first member of the Women's Army Corps to be assigned to Infantry Headquarters at Fort Dix, NJ and the first member of the military body in the history of Fort Dix, to retire.

After 21 years in the army, she returned to her Virgin Islands home on the island of St. Croix and became the first woman hired by the island's first major industry, Harvey Alumina which later became Martin Marietta.

She was the first woman parole and probation officer for both the federal and territorial courts on St. Croix.

In the Tenth Legislature of the Virgin Islands, she was the first woman ever to be elected from St. Croix.

She ran for Lieutenant Governor of the Virgin Islands in 1974 and, once again, was the first woman ever to seek that post.

When she became Senate President Rouss, in January 1981, it ? was the culmination of a long history of "firsts."

Senator Rouss is an incredible woman-human, humorous and humane, she is also blunt, tough and a "no nonsense" person who believes that "a government official must demonstrate honesty, integrity and accountability to the people."

She was born on St. Croix and was one of the 16 children of William Henry Rouss, a farmer, and his wife, Emmeline Leontine Rouss. Only 3 of her family survive. Her brother Lesville, is a retired building contactor with 25 years of service in the U. S. Army, who now resides in Puerto Rico. Her sister Erma Grant-Rouss is an educator on St. Croix.

Senator Rouss was married for six years while in the service and is now divorced. She had one child, a son, who died in infancy.

She adopted four children in 1966 and has raised them with a combination of love, pride and a master sergeant's discipline. Her oldest, Louis La Place Jr., followed in his mother's footsteps and served in the U. S. Army, in Germany. He was recently honorably discharged and is now a member of the Virgin Islands National Guard. Lawrence La Place, his brother, is a process technician at the Hess oil refinery on St. Croix.

Ruby Maria Rouss is a student at Northern Michigan University at Marquette, majoring in clinical psychology and this year was on the Dean's list. Martita Elena Rouss has just entered Webber College in Babson Park, FL.

Senator Rouss is also rearing a fifth youngster, Catherine Michelle Damidaux, who was born in Algeria and came to St. Croix from France. She is an "A" student at the island's Central High School.

The brilliant and charismatic First Lady of the Legislature is remarkable for her sense of humor - a characteristic which never leaves her even under the greatest pressures of her office. She is an American patriot, a woman of ideals and, obviously a unique human being.

When she is chatting informally, she, like most of her colleagues, frequently speaks in the lilting calypso of the islands; but, as Senate President, she resorts to the strong voice and cultivated speech of an orator.

Tourists visiting the Legislature, are alternately impressed by her authoritative delivery and the peppering of earthy humor and Yiddish one-liners with which she conducts her sessions.

Like all politicians, she is controversial. Her straight forward, "tell it like it is" approach has made her many enemies - especially among those who "wheeler-deal" in the islands' complex politics and who resent her army "spit and polish" approach to rules and regulations.

However, for every enemy, Ruby - as she is known to all of her supporters - has dozens of fiercely dedicated constituents and friends.

Senator Rouss likes to remind these supporters that she came from humble beginnings. She frequently refers to herself as an innovator and the list of "firsts" in her official biography is impressive, indeed.

However, it is the tough, fighting spirit, the honesty and directness of the woman, along with her concern for the "little people," that made her the biggest vote-getter on her home island of St. Croix.

When a fourth version of a constitution for the United States Virgin Islands was recently submitted to the voters for approval, major officials, including the Governor, were in favor of the document.

Ever the individualist, Senate President Rouss took no position until the last possible moment, when, on the night before the voting, she appeared on Radio and Television to voice her opposition to the proposed constitution and the need for drastic revisions to the document.

Many, many persons have credited Senator Rouss for the resounding defeat of the constitution. Rouss stated: "All the proponents were saying, 'We know it isn't perfect, but vote for it and we will change it.'" I said, "You don't go out and buy two left-footed shoes and then go looking for a shoemaker to make a right foot shoe out of one of them. I felt like Horatio at the Bridge of Thermopylae."

One reason for the dissident forces in political St. Thomas is Sen. Rouss's penchant for "telling it like it is." One of her first acts on assuming the presidency, was to take over a building formerly occupied by the Port Authority.

Despite pleas of "it can't be done," or "it's always been done this way," she plunged into it with complete abandon. She served notice that the legislature would take over the building, gave them a deadline by which to get out — then moved in.

She has words for those who profess to be women's libbers—according to Ms. Rouss, black women have always been liberated. She says that black women should take care to prepare themselves for the roles they wish to fulfill, then forget about the sexual nuances, leave your womanship at home, and be prepared to do the job.

Virgin Island Government

The U.S. Virgin Islands were initially administered by the U.S. Navy. Subsequently in February 1931, jurisdiction was transferred to the Department of the Interior. In 1936, an Organic Act was passed by Congress giving universal sufferage to the territory's residents. Revision of this Act in 1954 allowed greater home rule, created a unicameral legislature and provided for a territorial governor appointed by the President of the United States.

In 1969, Congress passed legislation which allowed Virgin Islanders to elect their own Governor. Dr. Melvin H. Evans became the first elected governor in 1970. He was succeeded by Cyril E. King in 1975 and Juan Luis in 1978. Both the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor are elected to serve four - year terms.

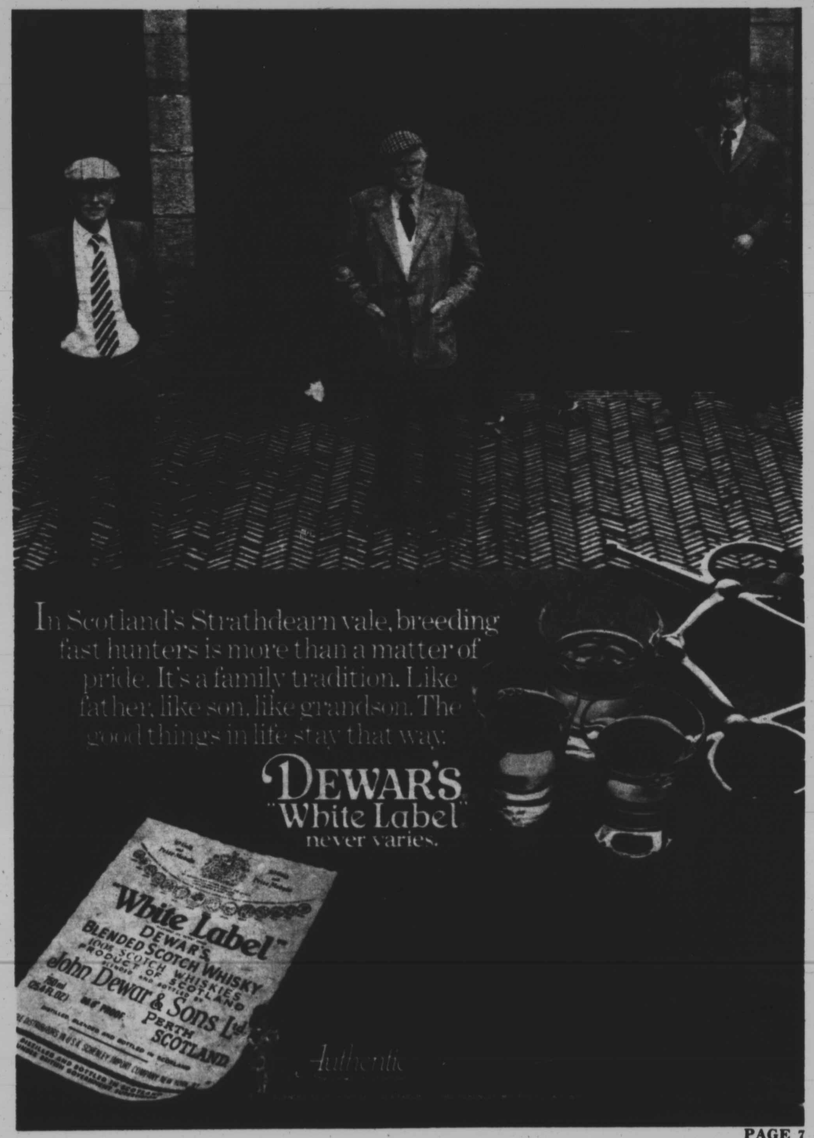
The legislative branch consists of fifteen (15) Senators elected for two - year terms. Seven Senators are elected from St. Thomas - St. John and seven from St. Croix. One Senator - at - large, who must be a resident of St. John, is elected by the voters of all three islands.

President of the Legislature is chosen by a vote among elected senators.

—Celebrity

(Continued from Page 4)

(Donna Summer) before this country will recognize them. The dispute is whether she died in America trying to make a come back or penniless in France?

NICHOLAS GRAHAM; Jackson, FLA.

A-Josephine Baker, the grand dame of the French cabaret died virtually penniless April 12, 1975 in Paris. Born June, 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri the provocative Ms. Baker went to Paris in 1925 after appearing in various revues and nightclubs, including the famed Cotton Club in Harlem. She went abroad to escape the repression and racism that confronted blacks, especially in the entertainment industry . She electrified the opening night audience of the musical "Black Birds" appearing completely nude except for a single pina flamingo feather.