

A Guide to the Lucy Simms Oral Histories, 2000 SdArch 0020

Lucy Simms oral histories
2000



Title Statement

A Guide to the Lucy Simms Oral Histories, 2000 SdArch 0020

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Publication Statement

Publisher: James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

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URL: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/>



September 2021

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-08 07:07:29 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Revision Description

2022-07 Normalized title

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SdArch 0020

Unit ID

/repositories/4/resources/665

Unit Date

2000

Language

English

Abstract

The oral history collection includes the recollections of Carlotta Harris, Edgar Johnson and wife, Wilhelmina Johnson, Louise Winston, and Elon Rhodes, former students of Lucy Simms, and Ellen Walker, current owner of the Lucy Simms house.

source

Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator

Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator

Getachew, Wondwossen

Extent

0.09 cubic feet 5 folders, 6 audiocassettes

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection open to research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

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Acquisition Information

Cassette tapes, transcripts, and background paper were donated to Special Collections by interviewer Wondwossen Getachew in January 2001.

Processing Information

At some point after their donation in 2001, the cassette tapes were reformatted into a digital format.

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], Lucy Simms Oral Histories, 2000, SdArch 0020, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Bio/Historical Note

Lucy Frances Simms was born into slavery in 1856 at the Hill Top Plantation located along Harrisonburg's northeast boundary. After Emancipation, her family settled on the same land where they were formerly enslaved, known as Newtown. As a young girl, Simms attended the Whipple School, Harrisonburg's first African American schoolhouse near Blacks Run, and later enrolled at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia where she studied alongside Booker T. Washington. After graduating in 1877 with a teaching certificate, Simms returned to the Harrisonburg area, where she taught three generations of Black students over the course of five decades. She began her teaching career at Long's Chapel schoolhouse in Zenda where she taught for one year before taking a position at the Effinger Street School in Harrisonburg. Simms taught there for fifty-one years until her death in 1934. She is buried in Newtown Cemetery. Her advocacy and commitment to teaching was commemorated by the Lucy F. Simms School which was built in 1939 as the city's new school for Black students and named in Simms's honor. The school, now known as the Lucy F. Simms Continuing Education Center, was in operation until 1966 when the local schools desegregated.

Scope and Content

The oral history collection includes the recollections of Carlotta Harris, Edgar Johnson and wife, Wilhelmina Johnson, Louise Winston, and Elon Rhodes, former students of Lucy Simms, and Ellen Walker, current owner

of the Lucy Simms house. Topics discussed include Lucy Simms as an educator and her teaching style; local African American education more broadly; and social, economic, and demographic changes to Harrisonburg's African American neighborhoods.

Keywords

oral histories (literary works)

African American teachers -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Sources

African American teachers and the community -- Sources

African American neighborhoods -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Sources

African Americans -- Education (Elementary) -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Sources

African Americans -- Education (Secondary) -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Sources

African Americans -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- History -- Sources

African Americans -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Social life and customs -- Sources

African Americans -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- Economic conditions -- Sources

Slavery -- Virginia -- Rockingham County

Segregation in education -- Virginia -- History

Social change

Harrisonburg (Va.) -- Race relations

Harrisonburg (Va.) -- History -- 20th century

Harrisonburg (Va.) -- History -- 19th century

Rockingham County (Va.) -- History

African Americans -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg -- History

Getachew, Wondwossen

Lucy F. Simms School (Public school)

Simms, Lucy F. (Lucy Frances), 1856-1934

Effinger Street School

Arrangement

Collection materials are arranged according to interviewee.

Description of Subordinate Components

Background paper

Unit ID 20-1

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25784

Unit Date October 2000

Mixed Materials [1000898334] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Ellen Walker interviewed by Wondwossen Getachew

Unit ID 20-2

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25785

Unit Date 2000 October 13

Creator Walker, Ellen, 1951-

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Extent 01:20:00 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)

Scope and Content

Records the reminiscences of Ellen Walker, who purchased and renovated Lucy Simms' Harrisonburg house in 1997. Describes her childhood and school experiences in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the 1950s and 1960s, during the transition from segregation to integration. Discusses the economic and social impact of segregation on the school systems. Relates how she moved to Harrisonburg in 1994, where she found the

Simms house, abandoned and in disrepair. Describes the process of buying the house from the City of Harrisonburg and renovating it with the help of volunteers from the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Mentions a number of Simms' papers and letters found in the attic, during renovation. Describes Simms' family, including her mother, sister, and two brothers; John Simms and Ulysses Wilson. Gives a brief account of the final days and death of Lucy Simms in the house, in 1934.

Location of Interview

Recorded at Ellen Walker's residence at 231 East Johnson Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia. It was the former residence of Lucy F. Simms.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25813

Mixed Materials [1000898334] 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Extent 20 pages

Original audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25814

Audio SA020-CS-002 (Audiocassette)

Preservation copy audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25815

Audio SA020-CS-006 (Audiocassette)

Carlotta Harris interviewed by Wondwossen Getachew

Unit ID 20-3

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25816

Unit Date 2000 November 2

Creator Harris, Carlotta (Mary Carlotta Newman), 1911-2015

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Extent 00:49:33 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)

Scope and Content

Records the reminiscences of Carlotta Newman Harris, who was a neighbor and student of Lucy Simms in the early twentieth century. Recounts her early family life and her experiences as a student in Simms' first grade class at the Effinger Street School in Harrisonburg, Va. (ca. 1917). Describes Simms' teaching technique and classroom demeanor. Discusses the daily routine at the school, including the role of the principal, her future father-in-law, William Harris, whom she calls "Dembe." Mentions events in subsequent primary grades and her eventual high school graduation from that same school in 1929. Includes recollections of the friendship between her mother and Simms, as well as Simms' standing and reputation in the community. Briefly describes the physical and social changes in her Harrisonburg neighborhood over several decades.

Keywords

Newman, George A. (George Ambrose), 1855-1944

Location of Interview

Recorded at 192 Kelly Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25819

Mixed Materials [1000898334] 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Extent 13 pages

Original audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25820

Audio SA020-CS-001 (Audiocassette)

Preservation copy audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25821

Audio SA020-CS-005 (Audiocassette)

Edgar Johnson interviewed by Wondwossen Getachew

Unit ID 20-4

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25822

Unit Date 2000 November 11

Creator Johnson, Edgar, 1925-2003

Creator Johnson, Wilhelmina

Creator Winston, Louise Helen, 1921-2019

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Extent 00:48:55 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)

Scope and Content

Records the reminiscences of Edgar Johnson, Wilhelmina Johnson, and Louise Winston, three former students of Lucy Simms at the Effinger Street School. Describes Simms' teaching style and her standing in the community. Includes a brief physical description of the Effinger Street School, as well as the Lucy F. Simms School, where all three students were transferred in 1939. Refers to Mary Fairfax, who taught at the Simms School. Discusses the social, economic, and demographic changes to Harrisonburg's African American neighborhoods after a major redevelopment project in the 1940s.

Location of Interview

Recorded at 424 Myrtle Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25823

Mixed Materials [1000898334] 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

Extent 11 pages

Original audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25824

Audio SA020-CS-003 (Audiocassette)

Preservation copy audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25825

Audio SA020-CS-007 (Audiocassette)

Elon Rhodes interviewed by Wondwossen Getachew

Unit ID 20-5

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25826

Unit Date 2000 December 1

Creator Rhodes, Elon W. (Elon Walter), 1922-2006

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Creator Getachew, Wondwossen

Extent 00:33:14 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)

Scope and Content

Records the reminiscences of Elon Rhodes, a lifelong resident of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Recounts his early family life and his experiences as a student in Lucy Simms' first grade class at the Effinger Street School

(circa 1928), and his subsequent high school graduation from that same school in 1939. Describes Simms' teaching technique and classroom demeanor, as well as the physical layout of the school building. Mentions the Lucy F. Simms school building, which opened the year he graduated from Effinger Street, in 1939. Briefly mentions the Effinger Street School's principal, William Harris, who would hold the same position at the Simms School. Describes race relations in Harrisonburg, as well as the changing demographic and social structure of the city over several decades. Touches briefly on his service in a segregated Army unit in World War II and his subsequent entry into Harrisonburg municipal government upon his return from the war. Discusses his two terms on the school board and his two years as the vice-mayor of Harrisonburg.

Location of Interview

Recorded at 366 Effinger Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25827

Mixed Materials [1000898334] 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

Extent 14 pages

Original audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25828

Audio SA020-CS-004 (Audiocassette)

Preservation copy audiocassette

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/25829

Audio SA020-CS-0008 (Audiocassette)