A Cornerstone of Community: Houston's Colored Library, 1913 to 1961 (Presentation for Donor Appreciation Day, African American Library at the Gregory School, Houston Public Library, June 2018)

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African American Library at the Gregory School

A CORNERSTONE OF COMMUNITY:
A History of Houston’s Colored Library 1913-1961

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Carnegie Libraries
Libraries for African Americans, ca. 1900

“Colored” Carnegie Libraries

- Atlanta, GA
- Evansville, IN
- Greensboro, NC
- Houston, TX
- Knoxville, TN
- Louisville, KY (x 2)
- Meridian, MS
- Mound Bayou, MS
- Nashville, TN

- New Orleans, LA
- Savannah, GA
Houston’s Carnegie Library, 1904

Fourth Ward
African American Library at Gregory School

First Colored Library, 1909

Help from Booker T. Washington
African American Library at Gregory School

Frederick and Robin Streets

Library Opening, April 1913

New York Age, April 1913.  
Houston Post, April 1913.
African American Library at Gregory School

Library Opening, April 1913

William Sidney Pittman, architect

William Sidney Pittman and his wife Portia, daughter of Booker T. Washington.
Librarians, 1909-60

Colored Library:
- Emma Myers (1909-11)
- Pauline Lewis (1911-13)
- Lillian Hostettler (?)

Colored Carnegie Library:
- Bessie Osborne (1913-21)

Colored Carnegie Branch:
- Bessie Osborne (1922-32, 1936-37)
- James Hulbert (1933-35)
- Murphy Kibbe (1935)
- Florence Bandy (1930s-40s)
- Willie Bell Anderson (1940s-50s)
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Colored Carnegie Branch, 1922

Books and Literature
Programs and Partnerships

**Negroes of Houston Plan Sale of Red Cross Seals**

F. Rivers Barnwell, lecturer to negroes, returned Friday from a trip to Victoria, where he made plans for the sale of Red Cross seals among the negroes of that city.

He will cooperate with Dr. F. Light, pastor of the Antioch church, in putting on the sale of stamps among the negroes of Houston.

R. Stockwell, chairman of the antituberculosis association, will make an address in a few days before the negroes at the negro library.

*Houston Post, 1919*

School children visit, ca. 1940s.

Community Space

**Inaugurate Membership Drive for Local Branch of Colored Association**

The Houston branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will inaugurate a membership drive with a mass meeting at 3:30 p.m. Sunday at the Mount Vernon Methodist Episcopal church, Clark and Burnett streets.

Rev. E. H. Holden, pastor of the church, announces an interesting program has been prepared.

At 8:30 p.m. Monday the Houston branch will hold a business meeting at the Carnegie (negro) library. One of the important matters to come before the meeting will be a consideration of representation at the anti-lynching conference to be held in New York May 5 and 6.

*Houston Post, 1919*
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Community Space

Negro Art Guild of Houston.

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Desegregation and Last Years, 1953-60

20
African American Library at Gregory School

Closure and Demolition, 1958-61

Conclusions

Colored Carnegie Libraries:
- provided “educational uplift”
- symbolized independence (albeit limited)
- connected and supported community organizations
- accumulated important collections of African American literature and history
- promoted reading and free association/“shared identity”
Shared Experience and Identity

“Since I was in public, the seemingly infinite variety of my reading was complemented by an endless variety of library occupants, who were young and old, able-bodied and physically challenged, soft and loud, bellicose and deferential. Naturally, all of the library’s patrons were black, or, as we then called ourselves: colored.

“What was so clearly inferable at the Western Branch Library were not only general, democratic vistas of American reading but also specifically African American diasporic valuations of literacy, the library, the habits of public reading as a certain path—in the designation of the great black orator and writer Frederick Douglass—from slavery to freedom.”

- Houston Baker, Louisville (taken from I Don’t Hate the South, 2007).

Do you remember the Carnegie Branch?

I am attempting to locate people who visited the library and preserve their memories for future generations.

If you can help in any way, please contact me at 601-266-4228 or matthew.griffis@usm.edu.

You are invited to take with you:

- a project flier
- my business card
Contact

Feel free to contact me at matthew.griffis@usm.edu.

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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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Slides 2, 4, 5, 10, 14, 17, 18: Roots of Community Collection.

Slides 3 and 22: Jackson Davis Collection of African American Photographs, University of Virginia Special Collections Library.

Slide 6: Texas State Historical Society.

Slide 8: Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Archives and Special Collections.

Slide 9: Houston History Alliance (special thanks to Ron Bass).

Slide 12: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Slides 18 and 23: Western Branch Library African American Archives, Louisville Free Public Library.