
AACR Newsletter

Archivists and Archives of Color Roundtable

Vol. 28, No. 2
February 2014

***The home of the First Lady of Negro America: an institutional profile
of the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation***

by Dr. Ashley N. Robertson, Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation

Born in Mayesville, South Carolina to formerly enslaved parents, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune rose from the cotton fields to become known as the “First Lady of Negro America” and a premiere Civil Rights activist during the 20th century. In 1953 she established the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation inside her home with the intent to “awaken people and have them realize there is something in the world they can do.” It also provided scholarships and supported projects on racial equality. Initially the home was the headquarters for the Foundation but has since become a museum to honor the legacy of Dr. Bethune. The National Park Service recognized it as a National Historic Landmark in 1975.

The home itself has historical significance. An African American architect, Mr. A.B. Raddick, built it in 1905. He also built homes for wealthy whites who lived on the beachside of Daytona Beach, and this home was thought of as a “model home.” In 1913, Mr. James Norris Gamble, the chemist who devised the formula for ivory soap, and Mr. Thomas White of White Sewing Machine Company purchased the home for Dr. Bethune. Upon its establishment, the Foundation was initially separated from Bethune-Cookman University. Since Dr. Bethune’s 1955 death, it has become an entity of the school. In 2005 the Florida Department of State Division of Historical Resources awarded the home a grant of \$300,000 to begin renovations and in 2009 the Volusia County Echo program awarded \$259,600 in grants resulting in a complete makeover of the home. It reopened in 2011.



Home of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune

(Bethune continued on p. 8)

Inside this issue

Profile of the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation...1

Letter from the chair...2

Technology's impact on preserving history...3

From inspiration to creation...4

Exploring Delaware's Black faith experiences...5

Where does the archivist's obligation end?...7

Senior Co-Chair's Letter

by Derek T. Mosley
Ernest J. Gaines Center,
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Dear Roundtable:

**"Words mean nothing.
Action is the only
thing. Doing. That's
the only thing."**

-Ernest J. Gaines

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to another issue of our newsletter. I hope you read it with enjoyment and catch up on what your colleagues are doing in the field. The task forces set up last fall are busy working hard and the steering committee is doing the same. Please check upcoming issues for more information on their work.

I would like to encourage you to seek out students to submit applications for the Harold T. Pinkett Minority Student Award so that that we can bring new professionals to our roundtable and SAA. The deadline for submission is February 28. As always, if you have any ideas or thoughts for activities you would like to see the roundtable do, please let me know.

Congratulations to the 2013-2015 ARL/SAA Mosaic Fellows

Lauren Gaylord, University of Texas at Austin
Yvonne Ivey, University of North Texas
Daniel Johnson, University of North Texas
Karen Karyadi, University of California, Los Angeles
Annie Tang, University of California, Los Angeles

Dude where's my movement?: the intersection of technology & historic preservation

History today has become fluid and accessible. It sometimes takes the form of 140 characters on Twitter, or by clicking 'like' on social media – a coveted response attached to an image of the face of a freedom fighter or leader. History, in the form that we see it today, encourages conversations among archivists, historians, librarians and researchers to strategically consider new methods to capture history. Most importantly, it ensures that our story continues beyond oral tradition.

"To understand the future you must know the past." I have heard this quote countless times – but until recently I had not truly begun to make a deliberate effort to apply this principle to my daily life. Recently, I began an ever changing relationship with history. Not just history homework in the form of a twenty chapter book, or browsing articles, but by choosing to daily interact with history through technology.

Let me explain...

Last October, the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History held its 98th Annual Convention in Jacksonville, Florida. The CBCF Avoice Virtual Library Project (www.avoiceonline.org) hosted a panel that was geared toward creating a space to discuss the role of technology and how it influences the preservation of black history. To set the tone, we paid particular attention to the recent anniversary of the March on Washington, a movement that acted as a catalyst for change. As the anniversary approached, as the Avoice Project Coordinator, I made a considerable effort to share old newspaper clippings, videos, and photos that helped to build momentum similar to that of 1963. These archival documents aided in telling the story of the March on Washington, and it forced me to realize that technology contributed single handedly to annihilating the disconnect that many may have had before. Technology provided a new avenue for the masses to engage, learn, connect, and understand the value of historic preservation.

During the ASALH panel, further insight on the topic reinforced my thoughts. Panelists discussed the impact on the general public, academia and how history is prioritized in communication. Throughout the discussion, there was an emphasis on recognizing that there is an unspoken desire to remain virtually relevant in this present time. It was evident that what happened "then" was appealing "now" in order to navigate modern times. Technology created a mechanism that allowed us to evaluate the value and impact of history concurrently.

So I left the conference wondering - In this digitally forward time, how can we continue to preserve and share history? How can we ensure that our understanding of the past remains at the forefront - a blueprint used in determining our future?

(Movement continued on p. 6)

by D'shawna C. Bernard

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation

Avoice Virtual Library Project

Journey to Heritage Salon Magazine

As I reflect back upon my attraction to the museum studies field, I must admit that the magnetism of history, historical homes and museums drew me into this profession. It all began for me in 1995 when I arrived on the campus of Bethune-Cookman University and discovered the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation, home of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. Throughout my childhood, I traveled extensively and within my travels I indulged in a visit to a museum or a tour of the city; it was a natural fit for me to take on the challenge of obtaining employment with the Foundation. Although I did not achieve my original goal of being compensated for my work, I reached an even bigger accomplishment of gaining priceless time in capturing the spirit and determination of Dr. Bethune. I spent countless hours (after the first year of acquiring 100 hours in a semester, I lost track of the actual amount of time) giving tours, exploring the home, handling objects and filling myself with all things Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. After completing my invaluable time at the Foundation and earning my Bachelor's degree, I moved forward into law school and found myself, after one year, transitioning into graduate school at Michigan State University.



It was at Michigan State University that I obtained the knowledge that what I did at the Foundation was museum work and this could be a career for me. After earning a Master's degree and a certification in Museum Studies, I discovered I was the first African American to complete the Museum Studies program. Learning this disheartening fact, I attempted to inquire as to how I could gain more interest for museums within my culture, especially African American museums. Out of this thirst and passion, a blog and ultimately a magazine, *Heritage Salon*, was born.

As I think of my many loves, archives are one of my favorite areas that has such a strong impact in capturing the history of African Americans. Through the magazine, I attempt to expose the many institutions that focus their mission on interpreting African American history, art and culture through exhibitions, programs and sometimes archives. If you research many of these institutions you will learn that they mostly began out of someone's collection/archives of a particular subject or person. Without archives there would not be many institutions.

When I began this journey of self-publishing a magazine, I never imagined that I would be able to successfully complete something of this magnitude. I had no prior knowledge of how to publish a magazine, but knew how to manage a project, collaborate with others and gain a creative flow. Through trial and error, advisement of others and reading "how to books," I learned how to publish a magazine with strict deadlines, writer's block and creative ideas.

Today, I continue my travels. In every city I embark upon, I immediately locate the nearest museum and if I am fortunate I stumble upon an African American museum. When I do arrive at a museum, I look for exhibitions that are appealing, easy to read, unique and understandable to a 5th grader as well as an adult. What makes a successful exhibition include all of these attributes and having some piece of history or interactive feature that draws strong interest on the subject matter. As I move forward with this passion and love, "the journey continues!"

With Museum Love,

Jada Wright-Greene

Editor's Note: Thank you to Jada Wright-Greene for sharing with the roundtable. It is a happy coincidence that Ms. Wright-Greene found early inspiration from her time volunteering with the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation profiled by Dr. Ashley N. Robertson in this issue.— Raegan C. Stearns

Forging faith and building freedom in Delaware

by Constance Cooper,
Delaware Historical Society

In September 2013, the Delaware Historical Society opened "Forging Faith, Building Freedom: African American Faith Experiences in Delaware." This 3,000 square foot exhibition presents the key role that Delawareans and Delaware played in the development of African American faith in the United States and showcases the richness and diversity of African American faith in Delaware. Throughout, the exhibition emphasizes the importance of the founders as people who challenged the United States to live up to its ideals and the role of the faith community in the lives of people who were excluded from mainstream society.

Featured in the exhibition are Delawareans Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and Samuel Cornish, who played major roles in the development of black churches in Philadelphia, New York, and New Jersey. But the main focus is on Peter Spencer and the Union Church of Africans (now the AUMP and UAME denominations) and the August Quarterly, which he founded in Wilmington in 1813 and 1814, respectively. The August Quarterly is now the oldest African American religious festival in the United States, and the African Union Church was the first independent black denomination in the nation.



Pilgrim Baptist Church, Newark, Delaware

late 1930s-early 1940s

Delaware Historical Society

"Forging Faith, Building Freedom" will be on display through summer 2014 at the Delaware History Museum in downtown Wilmington, Delaware.

For more information, visit www.dehistory.org



Mt. Enon Baptist Church, Milford, Delaware

late 1930s-early 1940s

Delaware Historical Society

The exhibition also presents a sampling of African American houses of worship, a gallery of notable black preachers, an extensive presentation of various aspects of congregational life, and a section on how the black church has participated in the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality. Some highlights include the African Union hymnal from 1839, an original pew from Star Hill AME Church outside Dover, Delaware, UAME and Roman Catholic clergy vestments, and the tombstones of Rev. and Mrs. Henry Marshall from Dover, Delaware.

This exhibition came together only with the participation of many churches, individuals, and organizations in Delaware's African American community who shared their stories and their treasures. Material also came from other public collections and the Delaware Historical Society's own collections. Dr. Lewis V. Baldwin, recently retired from the Department of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University and an expert on the black church, served as consultant historian and keynote speaker.

The Delaware Historical Society, a historically white organization, is in the process of increasing its involvement with Delaware's African American community. Although the Society has long had collections relating to African Americans, and has done some African American programming and exhibitions in the past, it is currently working with African Americans to create a Center for African American Heritage that will be an integral part of the Delaware Historical Society.

(Movement from p. 3)

My panel remarks had focused heavily on encouraging organizations and individual actors to create a framework where the posting or sharing of history isn't just frivolous, but I realize now that there is a conscious awareness that you are in fact contributing to the preservation of history in a new space. Technology helped to bridge the gap and made what seemed foreign or the stories of those long gone a reality.

Historian and librarian Dr. Janet Simms Woods echoed a similar sentiment and provided us with a timeline of how preservation and sharing of history has shifted over time. Ms. Lesley Gist, oral historian and radio personality, joined the panel via Skype, and introduced us to several online tools that she uses to engage with users across the globe. The frequency of innovation and new ideas in the technology presented us with a call to action to fast forward our work to present time. Ms. Adrena Ifill, Project Director of Avoice, mapped out the necessity to expand outreach by leaving digital footprints that would aid future generations in continuing to track the movement.

I left this conference truly uplifted, recognizing the shoulders I had to stand on, and the new responsibility to digitally engage. What we share and preserve is dependent upon what we value, and what we value is undeniably dependent on who we are. So I urge you to ask yourself daily, *"Where is my movement?"*



Learn more about the Avoice Virtual Library Project at www.avoiceonline.org

Save the date:

April 1 – applications due for the ARL/SAA Mosaic Program <http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment/arl-saa-mosaic-scholarship-program>

April 3— Wittliff Collections to host filmmaker Severo Perez at Texas State University's Alkek Library for the special program Writing Beyond Borders <http://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/exhibitions-events/events.html#borders>

April 14—applications due for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions <http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/awards-faculty-hispanic-serving-institutions>

The collections at A&M-Corpus Christi Special Collections & Archives comprise a local resource of national significance. The list of its holdings, in the thousands of linear feet they comprise, is too long to recount in this essay. The Dan Kilgore Collection of Texana, the E.E. Mireles & Jovita Gonzalez Mireles Papers, the Antonio Rodriguez Fuentes & Josefina Barrera Fuentes Family Papers, the Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz Papers, and many others rank as the university's most prized possessions, and their donors are valued supporters of the institution. Moreover, the Special Collections & Archives department focuses on Mexican American materials, which empower that important population.

I began my tenure as head of that department in 1990 and left in 2012. Like most professionals, I could look back on dealing with some stellar materials and some magnificent donors. From the time I announced that I would leave, donors and researchers began to ask about my replacement. A year after my departure from campus as Associate Director for Special Collections & Archives, there was still no job announcement, and the department relied on paraprofessionals. This delay contrasted with the expeditious manner in which the university, through the efforts of then library director Richard L. O'Keeffe, had acted twenty-two years before to offer me the position.

In late June 2013, I attended the ninetieth birthday celebration of Ralph Galván, Jr., patriarch of Corpus Christi's historic Galván family, the person who had been key to documenting that family's past, and a genuinely decent man. Seeing him surrounded by many of his relatives, all personal friends of mine who had entrusted the Special Collections with their materials, compelled me to act. On the one-year anniversary of my leaving campus, I wrote a letter to the university provost expressing concern over this delay. Among other things, my letter noted the invaluable nature of the collections, how perilous such a postponement could be to their care, how we should not violate the donors' trust, and our obligation to have a professional directly manage the department.

I sent copies of this letter to select donors, researchers, and supporters. Among the first persons to whom I forwarded a copy was Elaine Marsilio, education reporter, for the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, the city's major newspaper. Marsilio previously had shown appreciation for the work of the Special Collections & Archives department.

In response, she wrote a lengthy article that appeared on July 22, 2013. In her report, she demonstrated great balance between my comments and those of the provost, whom she also interviewed, and who stated that they first needed to hire a new library director. Marsilio's article also included the opinions of community spokespeople. Dr. Nancy Vera, educator and president of LULAC Council 4444, commented that "the least thing the university can do" is take care of our history. Ms. Terri Longoria, whose efforts led to the Special Collections acquiring the records of a leading Hispanic women's club, expressed concern about any future donations.

The newspaper placed the article as its front page, headline story, underscoring the significance that this subject had for its readership. Seldom does such media attention focus on archival matters. No one could miss the fact that the issue resonated in Corpus Christi. Two subsequent letters to the editor regarding the topic called for filling the position posthaste. The first was written by Rebecca Lyons, a past president of the A&M-Corpus Christi's Honors Student Association, while the other came from Dr. Vera, who more fully explained her dismay.

While popular support of Special Collections & Archives mounted, the university's search for a new library director failed. This development, in combination with inquiries from other prominent donors, especially of Mexican American-related materials, had a desired result. In late September 2013, the university posted the position for Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist. Unfortunately, this new position has problems. It does not carry the administrative title of Associate Director. The recent degrading of professional librarian employment status at A&M-Corpus Christi also needs to be dealt with to attract the best candidates. However, those of us who advocated for the institution to act are cautiously optimistic.

Archivists and curators continue to have ethical obligations to donors, the collections, and future researchers of the holdings they once managed. We must speak when those interests might be compromised. And the community's appreciation of what we do on the local level will help preserve our documentary treasures.



Dr. Thomas H. Kreneck, 2012
Todd Yates, photographer
Corpus Christi Caller-Times
Image used with permission

(Bethune from p. 1)

The Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation sits on the campus of Bethune-Cookman University in the heart of Daytona's Beach's Historic Midtown Community. During the mid 20th century Midtown was a premiere African American community with several churches, stores, homes and businesses. The home sits directly behind "Hell's Hole" which was a city dump that Dr. Bethune was able to transform into what is known today as Faith Hall.

Inside the Foundation lie all the personal memorabilia and personal affects of Dr. Bethune. Her home features the dining room table where she hosted guests such as Langston Hughes, Marjorie Joyner and Ralph Bunche. In her spare time Dr. Bethune spent plenty of time reading about history, world affairs and politics and her personal library in the home reflects the diversity of her interests. Many of the original books found in the Foundation are autographed by writers. One of Dr. Bethune's favorite pastimes was to collect photos of her friends and family, the clubwomen, foreign dignitaries and government officials with whom she worked. The home's sunroom features a rare collection of photos of presidents, inventors and civil rights activists, many of which are autographed to Dr. Bethune.

Known around town as a "fashion icon" the Foundation also houses several of her dresses, shoes, hats, purses and jewelry. The stories surrounding the home are numerous and reflect her personal relationships with Jackie Robinson, Indian Ambassador Madame Pandit and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, all of whom stayed in the home during their visits.

Today the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation hosts hundreds of visitors each month who come from all across the United States to learn more about the life of the four-time presidential consultant, founder of Bethune-Cookman University and founder of the National Council of Negro Women. Throughout her lifetime she was able to receive eleven honorary degrees, consult in the founding of the United Nations and establish a legacy of hope, all of which is preserved and shared at the Foundation.

Note: Dr. Bethune's quotation comes from:

Elaine M. Smith and Audrey Thomas McCluskey, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 271.

.....
The Archivists and Archives of Color Roundtable is currently seeking submissions for its quarterly newsletter.

We welcome:

- articles about current news and trends
- institutional profiles and projects
- events and exhibits
- op-ed and perspective pieces on topical issues
- professional updates
- scholarships, grants, and recent acquisitions

Please submit materials to newsletter editor Raegan C. Stearns at rcstearn@netscape.net. Submissions should be 300-600 words and should follow the Chicago Manual of Style. Photographs or artwork included with submissions should have full copyright permission and be a minimum of 300 dpi.