

The African American Library at the Gregory School

A Project of the Houston Public Library

Introduction

The African American Library at the Gregory School will become the third major research library established and operated by the Houston Public Library. The other two research libraries, the Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research and the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, are both located within a few miles of the Gregory Elementary School, facilitating access to all resources. Staff members at the existing facilities have expertise in archival and genealogical collection development and management that will be invaluable in acquiring and managing the specialized collection in the new African American Library. In addition to these critical skills, the Houston Public Library offers staff expertise in collecting and managing oral histories as well as the development and presentation of quality programs for all ages.

Initially, three full-time staff members will be hired for the African American Library at the Gregory School: (1) a manager with programming skills for the facility, (2) an archivist to develop and manage the collection, and (3) a curator to plan and manage the exhibits. In addition, a part-time clerical person will be hired to provide support for these staff members.

This project will be divided into two phases. The first phase of the project will open the first floor of the building to customers and offer exhibits, programs, a classroom, black box theatre and a gift shop. The second phase will open the second floor of the building and offer access to materials that have been collected according to the attached policy.

Mission Statement

The African American Library at the Gregory School provides special collections, archives, exhibits, creative programming, oral histories photographs and manuscripts in support of, the collection, preservation and dissemination of historical documentation and cultural information about the African American experience in Freedman Town and the Greater Houston area.

PHASE I

The African American Library at the Gregory Lincoln School

History

Houston was home to more than 1,000 slaves on June 19, 1865. General Gordon Granger landed the first union soldiers at Galveston and announced that all slaves were free in Texas. After the Civil War the first black settlements were located along the southern edge of Buffalo Bayou. Land was cheap because whites did not want to live in this flood prone area. This area, Freedman Town, rapidly grew as blacks built homes and business establishments. They created their own utilities and services, paved the often wet streets with brick that they hand made. At the center of the community was the church. The Freedmen's Bureau and the American Mission Association opened schools in the black church providing adults with literacy and basic math skills. By 1870 the Texas Legislature created public schools for blacks and the Gregory Institute was created. By 1872 most students and teachers left the closed Freedmen Bureau schools to attend the Gregory School.

Building Needs (Interior – 1st Floor)

- Classroom - a replica or setting reminiscent of an 1870's classroom equipped with modern technologies for multi-media presentations to help bring history back to life.
- Black Box Theatre - a flexible space with movable seating and changeable settings and props to support a variety of living history presentations and activities.
- Exhibit and Reception Space - an area suitable for framed art pieces or large traveling displays; including interactive exhibits and multi-media presentations.
- Gift Shop – a revenue source (to be run by volunteers, an outside vendor or friends group) featuring commemorative items, post cards and stationary, art prints, etc.

Programming

A tribute to the place, people and events that have helped and will continue to shape Freedman Town and the Houston area; using history as a resource to create quality programming through the use of:

- Music
- Oral histories & folklore
- Drama and theatrical vignettes
- Demonstrations & crafts
- Multi-media presentations

Examples

- Thematic programs for Black History Month, Women's History, Black Music etc.
- Old Time Living
A glimpse of early life in the community – Houston then and now
Explore cookbooks and recipes with tastings
Exhibits of tool, utensils and equipment
- Genealogy Workshops
How to write your family Memoirs
Preserving old documents
Collecting and identifying antiques
Gathering oral histories
- Lecture Series
"From Mud cloth to Quilts"- African Fabrics and Traditions
Quilting workshops
Historical Architectural Styles in Houston
Brick Making
Row Houses
Biographical sketches on prominent blacks
Early Businesses – A discussion on the first black businesses and their history
- Conversations With.... An Author Series

Exhibits

Exhibits can be developed from materials duplicated from our Metropolitan Research Center and borrowed from a number of local and national agencies.

Examples

"Eyes on Third Ward" – (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) photographs on local faces and events in the black community of Houston
"Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions" – (Smithsonian)
"We Shall Overcome: Photographs from the African American Civil Rights Movement"
"African American Quilts" – MFA & The African American Quilters Guild, Houston
"Barbara Jordan" – (Texas Southern University and MFA)

Possible Partnerships/Resources/Contacts

- Houston Informer (pictures of first homes in Freedmen's Town)
- National Urban League- Historical records, information and surveys
- Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum and the Yates Community Archeology Program (YCAP) – Memories (Oral Histories) objects and documents
- Freedman's Town Association Inc.- Gladys House (713- 730-9414)
- Patricia Prather- U of H /African American Studies (Trailblazer Series)

- Houston Heritage Society- TX History and Lecture Series, Biographical information on Dr. and Ms. Benjamin Covington, Rev. Jack Yates. (Slide presentations and traveling track presentation)
- Antioch Baptist Church
- Dr Carol McDaniel- U of H Archeologist – possible study of the pattern of bricks being related to African design
- Catherine Roberts- Yates Museum
- Gordon Quan- Council Member in Support of restoring Andrew street brick
- Janis Hutchinson, PH.D, M.P.H. University of Houston- did an Archeological Study of Freedmen's Town Area
- NAACP
- Red Diaries (Houston's African American History) - Dr. Howard Jones

PHASE 2

African American Library at the Gregory School- Proposed Collection Development Policy

Collection Development Policy

The Archives seeks to document the African American experience in its entirety. All of the archival collections at the Gregory School must remain in closed stacks in order to insure that their preservation and safekeeping for use not only by present-day researchers but also for future generations. Materials collected by the African American library will include the following:

Manuscript Collections

The African American Library will collect the personal and professional papers of African American Houstonians in order to arrange, describe, and catalog these manuscript collections for use by researchers. The types of papers collected will include the papers of businesses, religious organizations, social clubs, service organizations, families, individuals, and cultural organizations. Government papers and records that are important to Houston's African American history, such as those relating to the establishment of San Felipe Courts (later Allen Parkway Village), the effort to have Freedmen's Town added to the National Register of Historic Places, or copies of military records relating to the 1917 Camp Logan race riot, in which several African American soldiers were murdered, should be within the scope of our collection policies.

Photographs

Photograph collections will constitute one of the most important collecting areas in the Gregory School library's archival collections. Visual aids such as photos are clearly one of the most important components of historical research and something that virtually everyone in our visually oriented society relates to. While the Houston Public Library's

Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) already has sizeable collections of historic African American photographs, copies of these should be made available to house with any newly acquired collections at the Gregory School to facilitate ease of use by researchers.

Architectural Drawings

The African American Library will solicit drawings by African American architects in order to document the built environment of African American Houstonians. However, due to the special handling and housing needs of architectural drawings, they will continue to be housed at HMRC, where large architectural collections and the facilities to store them already exist. An arrangement between HMRC and the Gregory School will provide for the retrieval and transportation of architectural drawings to the African American Library when researchers at the Gregory School request such drawings.

Oral Histories

Oral histories will be an important component of the Gregory School's historic collections. Oral history interviews will be conducted with people who have made important contributions to Houston's African American experience. The tapes will be transcribed and researchers may have access to both the typed transcripts and the original taped interview. Some of the interviews will be posted online in order to broaden their availability to researchers unable to visit the Gregory School in person.

Books/Newspapers

The archives will collect published works, including books and newspapers, relating to the history of African Americans in Houston, and any print materials that support the Archive's manuscript collections. Reference works that assist researchers in their historical investigations should also be included in the Gregory School's collections.

Family Histories/Genealogical Materials

While the Houston Public Library's Clayton Genealogical Library is the primary collector of genealogical materials in the city, copies of materials relating to Houston's African American citizens should also be housed at the Gregory School to facilitate people researching their family histories.

Audiovisual Materials

Compact discs, cassette tapes, and electronic digital formats documenting the contributions of African Americans to Houston's musical heritage will be collected. Older musical formats, such as LP records and 78 RPM records, may also be collected, but these materials will ultimately need to be reformatted or digitized. DVD's and VHS tapes relating to African American cultural, musical, historical, and social themes will also be included in the Gregory School's audiovisual collections.