2015-2016 Outreach & Programming Highlights

Happy New Year! 2015 has been an amazing year for outreach and programming at the African American Library at the Gregory School. We really focused our efforts on diversifying the kinds of programs we featured, in the hopes of furthering our reach in our community and the city. The Independence Heights (IH) exhibit was a tremendous success and was so well-received by the IH families and our patrons.

In conjunction with the exhibit, we had a plethora of events that brought different aspects of the IH community to the fore, including but not limited to a documentary on one of the IH founding families, a Booker T. Washington High School alumni program, and a special senior women’s church fellowship group tour and program. We were also thrilled to have the Bronze Eagles, the city’s premier, all-Black flying and aviation club. The Club has several chapters throughout Texas and is an affiliate of the Black Pilots of America. These gentlemen were a lot of fun and really shared their passion for all aspects of aviation.

The Gregory School was also delighted to feature a documentary on Houston’s DJ culture by the multi-talented photographer/deejay/documentarian, Jason Woods. Jason, a proud graduate of Jack Yates High School and a Prairie View alum, shared his latest work, “This Thing We Do: Houston’s DJ Culture Revealed” with a full-capacity audience, many of whom were first-time visitors to the Gregory School. Afterward, the Q&A session was lively and engaging, with discussions spilling out into our foyer and then our parking lot!

We are confident that the 2016 programming year will be equally as interesting and engaging, if not more so! We open the year with an interactive film and dramatic monologue about the Civil Rights movement, as well as an informative oral history workshop presented by our resident oral historian/archivist, Valerie Wade. {Continued on Page 2}
2015-2016 Outreach & Programming Highlights

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Although we promote and celebrate Black History year-round, February will be a really exciting month of programming. We are partnering with the National Park Service in celebration of its centennial year and bringing Dr. Joy Kinard, superintendent of the Charles Young Buffalo Soldier National Monument in Wilberforce, OH, to the Gregory School. Dr. Kinard is a passionate advocate for African American parks and historic preservation, and we look forward to her sharing her knowledge and experiences with our patrons. From an intergenerational dialogue on activism to mental health concerns in the African American community, these are just a few of the things we having in store for 2016. You won’t want to miss out on a single program, so come on out and join us!

Archivists’ Corner

The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church Collection

In January of 1866, seven months after slaves were freed in Texas (June 19, 1865), a small group of freed slaves organized Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, the first African American Baptist Church in Houston. In 1868, one of Antioch’s members, Jack Yates, was ordained at the first association meeting for African American Baptist Churches. This was the first National Baptist Convention, and Rev. Jack Yates became the first pastor of Antioch.

As the membership grew, and additional space was needed, Rev. Yates led the church to purchase its present site and build a brick structure. The church, located in the center of Freedman’s Town, was the center of activity for the African American community. It was the first brick structure built and owned by African-Americans in Houston.

Antioch provided the former slaves with opportunities to learn about God as well as ministries to help them develop educationally, economically and socially. The first official educational opportunity for freed African Americans began at Antioch. With the help of two missionaries, Rev. Yates began the Baptist Academy. The Baptist Academy taught fundamentals such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. It also taught various trades, thus enabling men and women to start their own businesses. The Baptist Academy later became Houston College, which in turn was the forerunner of Texas Southern University.

Today, Antioch still stands as a testament to Houston’s African American history as it continues to provide needs and services to the Houston community.

The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church collection here at the Gregory School consists of church programs, photographs, and scrapbooks that depict the historic legacy of this treasured institution.
University Collaborations at the Gregory School

For several years, the Gregory School has partnered with Rice University on our Scholars-in-Residence (SIR) Program, which assists graduate students whose research can benefit from the Gregory School’s archives and other Houston Public Library (HPL) resources. This collaboration has facilitated thought-provoking, original research in our academic community. In 2015, archivists at the Gregory School decided to expand our network of university connections and encourage more undergraduate and graduate students to engage with our collections. The result was a body of projects that demonstrate the important role that the Gregory School plays in our city.

Advancements in digital humanities present new and exciting opportunities for archival libraries like the Gregory School. In a wonderful combination of traditional research and new technology, Billy Glasco (Lead Archivist) and Miguell Ceasar (Processing Archivist) partnered with Dr. Jesse Esparza of Texas Southern University’s (TSU) History Department. Students in Dr. Esparza’s Spring 2015 and Fall 2015 Texas History courses conducted primary source research at the Gregory School. Each student wrote an essay on an item from our archival collection that represented an aspect of Houston’s history. The essays were then used to create a digital exhibit on African American history in Texas. This project benefitted these TSU students in several ways. It introduced them to the behind-the-scenes work of an archival library, helped them practice their writing skills, and gave them a glimpse of the nature of historical research. The students gave presentations on their archival items in early December.

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University Collaborations at the Gregory School

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We also held presentations for another group of students in December. Valerie Wade (Oral Historian) collaborated with Dr. Bernardo Pohl of University of Houston-Downtown’s (UHD) Department of Urban Education. The Fall 2015 semester projects for Dr. Pohl’s Social Studies Methods course centered on the gallery spaces at the Gregory School. These students created learning activities that will be available to K-12 teachers and student groups who would like to incorporate the Gregory School’s resources into their lesson plans. Due to the creativity of Dr. Pohl’s students, we now have several activities for young guests to use as they tour our gallery spaces. As a result of this partnership, these UHD students gained valuable practice composing curriculum materials for all age groups.

Last but not least, Dr. Monica Perales of University of Houston’s (UH) Public History program also incorporated the Gregory School into her course. Her graduate students conducted research on museums and libraries throughout the city, and two students wrote a detailed analysis of the history of our library and our relationship to the community.

As part of our mission to promote African American history, the Gregory School hopes to continue to build upon our relationships with Rice, TSU, UH, and UHD throughout 2016 and beyond. We believe that it is important to engage young scholars in the Houston area, and these collaborations are outstanding examples of how Houston’s graduate and undergraduate students can benefit from our resources. We thank them for their open-mindedness and enthusiasm, and we would like to offer gratitude to Dr. Jesse Esparza, Dr. Bernardo Pohl, and Dr. Monica Perales for working with us.
Featured Reading

The Gregory School not only has an amazing collection of archival items, but our Collections Librarian manages a multifaceted collection of adult and juvenile books related to African American history. Visit us to browse our book collection, which features these two brand new texts edited by Dr. Bruce A. Glasrud, a scholar of the history of African Americans in Texas and the American West.

In *Free Blacks in Antebellum Texas*, we learn about the dangers and risks of life on the Texan frontier. The research in this volume provides a great background for *Anti-Black Violence in Twentieth-Century Texas*. Moving from the frontier period to the present, this book provides an in-depth look at the history of lynchings and other acts of racist violence in Texas.

*Click the images to view information in the Houston Public Library online catalog.*

Oral History Spotlight

Honoring the Memory of Commissioner El Franco Lee

The African American Library at the Gregory School is saddened to hear of the passing of Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee on Sunday, January 3, 2016 at the age of 66. Commissioner Lee was the first African American elected to the county court in 1985, and he served continuously since then. During his political career, he had a profound impact on health programs that greatly improved the quality of life for youth and seniors.

To learn more about Commissioner Lee, you can listen to his oral history here: [http://bit.ly/1RKtdu7](http://bit.ly/1RKtdu7)
Walk-In Wednesdays

Every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm, the Gregory School hosts open hours for individuals who are interested in donating archival items to our collection. Our collections include papers, photos, and books donated by citizens from across the area. People who want to be a part of our oral history collection are also welcome to walk in each Wednesday to discuss potential interview appointments. If you are busy on Wednesdays, you can always call us at (832) 393-1440 or email us at hpl.gregoryschool@houstontx.gov to schedule an appointment to discuss donations and oral histories.

Special Features in Local Magazines

2015 was truly a year of recognition for the Gregory School. The archival work we do contributed to a piece on Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in the most recent edition of Downtown Magazine. You can click here — bit.ly/1PVjmjf — to read the article.

Our volunteer oral history transcription project with University of Houston—Downtown garnered a feature in their winter edition of UHD Magazine as well. Click here — http://bit.ly/1Q3tylp — to access this publication.

Community Resources

Meeting Rooms
If you need an elegant meeting space in the Midtown area, the Gregory School has two conference rooms available for reservation. We offer complimentary parking and free wireless internet for laptops and tablets.

Tours
Our gallery spaces offer an excellent history of the Fourth Ward area and African Americans in the greater Houston area.

If your group would like to book a conference room or take a tour of our galleries, please email us at hpl.gregoryschool@houstontx.gov for information.

Trivia Answer:
Albert “Al” Edwards; House Bill 1016 was written in 1979 and went into effect in 1980.