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Preservation and Special Collections Department

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Mary Ruth Robinson collection

Title: Mary Ruth Robinson collection
Collection No: MSS.487
Extent: 1.75 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1897-1991

Abstract: The collection comprises both personal and family documents of Mary Ruth Robinson of Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee, and a group of her photographs taken in Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua between 1978 and 1989.

Donor: Mary Ruth Robinson, Memphis, Tennessee, May 2001.
Processed by: Sara Law, September 2015; Gerald Chaudron, November 2015.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Mary Ruth Robinson collection, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: November 2015

Biographical information

Mary Ruth Robinson was the daughter of Zelma Pauline (b. 1884) and Henry Franklin Thompson (b. 1864) and was born on April 8, 1916, in St. Joseph, Missouri. Zelma was the daughter of Joseph A. Endicott (1855-1916), a school teacher who worked in St. Joseph from 1879. She was also a teacher, beginning her career at Lincoln School, St. Joseph, and also teaching in Knob Noster. Zelma's sister, Ruth L., married Dr. Estil Young Strawn in 1916, and her brother Arthur C. became a photographer. Henry Thompson, the son of Daphne (b. 1840), graduated with a Bachelor of Scientific Didactics from the Lincoln Institute, Jefferson City, Missouri, in 1897, and became a teacher in Memphis and Missouri.

According to an exhibition biography, Mary Ruth Thompson was raised on a farm near Knob Noster. She attended her father's college and graduated from Lincoln University with a bachelor's degree in secondary education in 1938. During the Second World War she worked as a riveter and later jobs included being a maid, rural school teacher, program director of a halfway house, small restaurant operator and case worker. Robinson lived in Kansas City, Missouri, and was working for the Internal Revenue Service when she transferred to Memphis, Tennessee in 1972.

After her retirement, Robinson devoted herself to peace related activities, writing and photography. Her photographs were exhibited in Memphis and Mississippi and she participated in several exhibits with the Photographers Forum. In 1978 she visited Cuba with the group "Promoting Enduring Peace", and then in 1983 and 1984 she went to Grenada and Cuba with the National Alliance of Third World Journalists. Her 1989 trip to Nicaragua was sponsored by the Office of the Americas. In 2012 Robinson was awarded the Lifetime Peacemaker Award by the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center.

Scope and contents

The collection comprises both personal and family documents of Mary Ruth Robinson and a group of her photographs. The documents belonging to Robinson's parents and grandfather include Zelma Endicott's diary for 1914-1915 and a photograph album of Endicott, Thompson and Strawn family images which gives some insight into the life of middle class African Americans in small-town Missouri. The bulk of the collection is fifty mostly black and white mounted photographs taken by Robinson in Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua which were featured in "The African Connection: Images from the Americas" exhibition in 1991.

Processing information

The photographic images were received framed and in six wooden crates. All but one of the prints was removed from their frames, with the frames and crates being disposed of.

Subject terms

Cuba—Photographs.
Grenada—Photographs.
Nicaragua—Photographs.
Robinson, Mary Ruth.

Inventory

Box 1

Series 1. Family and personal documents.

- 1 Diary: Zelma Pauline Endicott, 1914 October –1915 June.
- 2 Baby record book: Mary Ruth Thompson, 1916-1918.
- 3 Photographs: Zelma and Ruth Thompson, 1920. Photographer: Arthur. C. Endicott; Henry Franklin Thompson, circa 1916; Zelma Thompson, circa 1920.
- 4 Note on Thompson family births, undated.
- 5 Diploma (copy): Henry F. Thompson, Bachelor of Scientific Didactics, Lincoln Institute, Jefferson City, Mo., 1897.
- 6 Moten, J.S., *What the Graduates of Lincoln Institute Are Doing*, Atlanta: Franklin Printing, 1906. References Henry F. Thompson, pp. 66-67.
- 7 Newspaper (copy): *The Standard*, St. Joseph, Mo., 1916 August 18, 4pp. Front page contains obituary of Joseph A. Endicott (1855-1916).

OS *The Standard*, St. Joseph, Mo., 1916 August 18, 4pp.

- 8 Passports: Mary Ruth Robinson, 1977-1988 (3).
- 9 Promotional materials: “The African Connection: Images from the Americas” exhibition, Memphis, Tenn., 1991.

Box 2

- 1 Photograph album: Endicott, Thompson and Strawn families, circa 1910s.

Series 2. “The African Connection: Images from the Americas” exhibition, Memphis, Tenn., 1991, photographs.

Mounted prints, 11”x14”, black and white unless noted otherwise:

- Cuban Dancers I, Cuba, 1984.
- Cuban Dancers II, Cuba, 1984.
- Night Life (color), Cuba, 1984.
- Casa de las Americas (color), Cuba, 1984.
- Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, Grenada, 1983.
- Volunteer Workers I, Grenada, 1983.
- Volunteer Workers II, Grenada, 1983.
- Volunteer Workers III, Grenada, 1983.
- Publishing House—St. George Grenada, 1983.
- Grenada Carnival I, 1983.
- Grenada Carnival II, 1983.
- Signs of the Time (color), Grenada, undated (1983).

Hurricane Joan—October 1988, Nicaragua, 1989.
Bluefields, Nicaragua, 1989.
“Mother of the Disappeared”, Nicaragua, 1989.

Box 3

Mounted prints, 8”x10”, black and white unless noted otherwise:
Cuba, 1984:

Box 2

Box 3

Home for the Elderly I.
Home for the Elderly II (framed).
Home for the Elderly III.
Writers Meet.
Don Rojas.
Severo Aquiree del Cristo.
School Days I (color), 1978.
School Days II (color).
Cuban Dancers III.

Grenada, 1983:

Getting the News Out.
Grenada Carnival III.
A Little Girl.
National Alliance of the Third World Journalist (US).

Nicaragua, 1989:

A Mother Speaks.
Friends.
Father and Children.
Street Vender I.
Street Vender II.
At Play.
Recess.
Farm Family Near Jinotega.
One Destiny.
Getting Ready for Saturday Night.
Employees at Sandanista Office.
Pastor and Some Members of Moravian Church.
Central American University I.
Central American University II.
Central American University III.
Education.
A Visitor.
“Security”.
Worker at Sewing Cooperative.
Hotel Receptionist.
Community Organizer.
Oswaldo Morales.