

Steptoe Oral History Collection (SC69-4)

Introduction

This collection contains the planning documents and footage related to an oral history project to record experiences of people living and working in the Steptoe neighborhood. The collection also includes a film produced by Thompson Productions of Kansas City in conjunction with the oral history project, “A Step above the Plaza: Celebrating Westport’s African-American Community”.

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Rodney M. Thompson, Joe Louis Mattox, Mary Beveridge
Title: Steptoe Oral History Collection
Dates: 2006-2007
Size: 0.2 linear feet, 1 box
Collection Number: SC69-4

Donor Information

Gift, 2008, Rodney M. Thompson, Joe Louis Mattox, Mary Beveridge.

Citation Note

Steptoe Oral History Collection (SC69-4), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Administrative Information

Reproduction restrictions: The video, “A Step above the Plaza: Celebrating Westport’s African-American Community” is copyrighted.

Biographical/Historical Sketch

Planning for this oral history project began in spring 2006. Joe Louis Mattox, a local independent historian, had done extensive research on a small African American community on the southern end of Westport originally settled by former slaves. As development gradually uprooted the residents and homes, businesses and churches were destroyed, he thought it imperative to interview former residents while they could still be found.

In 2007, neighboring Saint Luke’s Hospital, which was expanding, offered to fund such a project. Saint Luke’s preferred a video project so Rodney M. Thompson of The Thompson Group was hired to produce the film. Interviews were conducted by Mr. Mattox during the period of August 14 – 21, 2007. Ten narrators were interviewed. All but one were former residents of the Steptoe neighborhood. The non-resident, William J. Shelby, is the son of Penn School Principal, G. W. Shelby.

Mary Beveridge of Kansas City Public Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections as well as David Jackson of the Jackson County Historical Society, participated in the planning of the project and images from both collections were used in the film.

This collection documents information about the neighborhood as well as an example of the daily life in a small, close-knit African-American community during the era of segregation.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains the planning documents and footage related to an oral history project to record experiences of people living and working in the Steptoe neighborhood. The collection also includes a film produced by Thompson Productions of Kansas City in conjunction with the oral history project, “A Step above the Plaza: Celebrating Westport’s African-American Community”. The documents in this collection came from Joe L. Mattox and Mary Beveridge and document their part in the planning process for this project. The DVDs were donated by Rodney Thompson.

Collection Inventory

- f. 1 Planning Documents, 2007
- f. 2 Interview Questions, n.d.
- f. 3 Interview Candidates, 2007
- f. 4 Kansas City Fire Department, 2006-2007
- f. 5 St. Luke’s, 2007
- f. 6 “Faces” of Kansas City, 2006-2007
- f. 7 Churches, 2007
- f. 8 Articles and Background Materials, 2006-2007
- f. 9 Kansas City Public Library Materials, 2006-2007
- f. 10 “A Step above the Plaza: Celebrating Westport’s African-American Community” (DVD), n.d.
- f. 11 Westport/Steptoe Oral History Project Interviews (DVDs)
 - Avery, Russell
 - Counts, Rev. Stanley
 - Gray, Mai
 - Hill, Beverly Avery
 - Hinton, Mary Louise
 - Ruffin, Sonnie
 - Russell, Leah
 - Shelby, William
 - Stone, Mary Virginia
 - Turner, Mark

Originally processed in 2008. Reprocessed by Kara Evans Flinn, Special Collections Librarian/Archivist, January 2022.