
Guide to the

EARLIE MAE WHEELER COLLECTION 1949-1986

.2 linear ft.

Accession Number: 9899-84

Collection Number: 54

**Prepared by Kevin Kendro
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CITATION: Earlie Mae Wheeler Collection, Collection 54, Box number, Folder number, Irving Archives, Irving Public Library.

Biographical Sketch

Earlie Mae Collins was born in Bastrop County, Texas, on August 1, 1907. Her parents were Henry and Artelia Collins. The family lived on a farm near the Colorado River. Artelia Collins died in 1914, leaving behind her husband and four children. Henry Collins then married Susie Hayden of Austin, Texas, and she became mother to the Collins children.

Earlie Mae attended the Union Hill Elementary School, a one-room rural school, for seven years. She then spent two years at Emiel High School in Bastrop. The onset of the Depression made it impossible for her to attend school in Bastrop any longer, so she spent one year at the local community high school near the family farm. She then moved to Austin to attend the all-women Tillotson College. She finished high school at Tillotson and spent the next two years at the college earning her teaching certificate.

Ms. Wheeler spent one year teaching in Bastrop County. In 1931, she took a job teaching at the African-American school on the Trinity Farms property. Trinity Farms was a corporate farm located in the Trinity River bottoms between Dallas and Irving, Texas. The farm had two one-room school buildings -- one for the children of the farm's Mexican employees and one for the children of the African-American employees. The few white children from the farm were taken to the nearby school in the city of Irving. The Irving Independent School District was charged with staffing the two schools on the farm, and Earlie Mae Collins was hired to teach at the African-American school.

At the school, she taught the first through seventh grades. In the evening, she taught the parents of the children to read and write. In 1938, she married Fred Wheeler from Waldo, Arkansas. Fred Wheeler worked for a wood flooring company in Dallas. The couple lived on the Trinity Farms where Earlie Mae taught for fifteen years. In 1946, the Trinity Farms property was sold for industrial development.

The Wheelers moved to the African-American community of Bear Creek just west of Irving. For two years, Ms. Wheeler ran a kindergarten out of a building on the couple's property. Then in 1949, she began teaching at the Sowers School #2, which, during the era of segregation, was an African-American school run by the Dallas County Common School District. The school served the Bear Creek community and offered grades one through seven. High school children were bused to Booker T. Washington High School, an all-black school in Dallas.

In 1951, Earlie Mae Wheeler completed her undergraduate degree in education at Tillotson College. In 1959, Fred Wheeler died in an auto accident. The Irving Independent School District took over operation of the Sowers School #2 in 1955 and built a modern building, including a high school, and renamed the school J. O. Davis School after Josyie O. Davis, a long-time teacher in the Bear Creek community. Ms. Wheeler taught home economics at the high school.

The Irving Independent School District integrated its schools during the mid-and-late-1960s. The J. O. Davis School closed in 1969 after all its students were moved into the mainstream Irving schools. During the early 1970s, Ms. Wheeler taught a special education class for elementary school students in the Irving Independent School District. She retired in 1975.

Earlie Mae Wheeler died on July 2, 1991.

Sources:

The Earlie Mae Wheeler Collection #54 and the Social Security Death Index.

Scope and Content Note

The Earlie Mae Wheeler Collection is housed in five file folders in a half-size manuscript box. The collection is arranged in four series.

Series I. Documents, consists of several different types of documents collected by Mr. Wheeler. Notable among them is a brief autobiography, a short history of the Sowers School #2 concentrating on the years 1949 to 1960, a letter requesting that a school be named after Earlie Mae Wheeler, Ms. Wheeler's grade book from 1949-50, and an Order of Service for Linuard Walton's funeral. Mr. Walton was principal of Sowers School #2 and J. O. Davis School, 1949-1969. He died in 1980.

Series II. is made up of eight photographs. The subject of the photos is Sowers School #2 and its student body and activities, 1949-1959.

Series III. consists of a scrapbook. The bulk of the scrapbook contains photos of students from Ms. Wheeler's classes in the 1960s. Also in the scrapbook are photos from a basketball game at J. O. Davis School, class and faculty photos from Lively Elementary School, 1973-1975, and a newspaper article about Ms. Wheeler, n.d. The photos in the scrapbook have undergone damage from tape and glue. As a preservation measure, the scrapbook was photocopied and then the photos and other items were removed from the scrapbook pages and placed in acid-free photo sleeves.

Series IV. Oral History Tapes, consists of tapes from two recorded interviews with Earlie Mae Wheeler. The first was conducted in 1982 by a student doing a project on aging in America, and the second was done in 1986 by friends of Ms. Wheeler. The tapes have been placed in the Irving Archives' Oral History Collection. Transcripts of the interviews can be found in this series and in the Archives' Oral History Collection.

Provenance Statement

The Earlie Mae Wheeler Collection was donated to the Irving Archives by Catie Morgan on August 19, 1999. Prior to its donation to the Irving Archives the material was in the possession of Ms. Wheeler and later Catie Morgan.

Literary Rights Statement

Permission to publish from the Earlie Mae Wheeler Collection must be obtained from the Irving Archives, Irving Public Library.

Note to Researcher

See the Irving Archives Lantern Slide Collection for photos of the school buildings on the Trinity Farms in 1925.

Container List

Series I. Documents

Box 1

Folder

1 Documents, 1980s

Contains a brief typewritten autobiography of Earlie Mae Wheeler; a handwritten history of Sowers School #2 from 1949 to 1960 by Earlie Mae Wheeler; a typewritten synopsis of the same history of the school; and a letter to the Irving school district requesting that a school be named in honor of Ms. Wheeler.

2 Documents - Booklets, 1949 and 1980

Contains a teacher's grade book entitled Texas Teacher's Daily Register for Public Schools, 1949-50. The grade book contains student's names and grades from that school year. Also included is an Order of Service from the funeral of Linuward Walton, August 29, 1980. Mr. Walton served as principal of the Sowers School #2 and the J. O. Davis School from 1949 until its closing.

Series II. Photographs and 35mm Slides

3 Photograph identification numbers are:

54-01 - Sowers School #2 student body in front of the school, 4 in. x 5 in., b&w, 1955.

54-02 - Classroom scene, some children at desks, some standing,

4 in. x 5 in., b&w, n.d., (c. 1957).

54-03 - Bob Horton at bank holding a check at cashier's window. Bob Horton donated the land on which Sowers School #2 was rebuilt after it burned. That is the site of the present J. O. Davis School, 10 in. x 8 in., b&w, n.d., (c. mid-1940s).

54-04 - Students in classroom, Earlie Mae Wheeler at front of class. The photo was taken on "Texas Roundup Day" at the school, so some of students are wearing cowboy hats, 8 in. x 10 in., b&w, 1950. Ms. Wheeler discusses this photo in her oral history interview.

54-05 - Sowers School #2 student body in front of the school, 8 in. x 10 in., b&w, n.d. (c. mid-1950s).

54-06 - Students performing in a May Day pageant in front of Sowers School #2, 8 in. x 10 in., b&w, 1955. Ms. Wheeler discusses this photo in her oral history interview.

54-07 - Crowd watching students perform at May Day pageant in front of Sowers School #2, 8 in. x 10 in., b&w, 1958. Ms. Wheeler discusses this photo in her oral history interview.

54-08 - 35mm slides (14) taken while Earlie Mae Wheeler was doing a tape-recorded interview, color, 1986.

Series III. Scrapbook, 1963-1974

4 Contains a scrapbook of photos of Early Mae Wheeler's ex-students at J. O. Davis School, 1960s; faculty at Lively Elementary School, 1975; class photos of Earlie Mae Wheeler's special education classes at Lively School, 1973-75; and photos of a basketball game at J. O. Davis School, n.d.

The photos in the scrapbook have suffered damage from tape and glue. As a preservation measure, the scrapbook has been photocopied and the contents have been removed from the scrapbook pages and placed in acid-free folders.

Series IV. Oral History Tapes and Transcripts, 1982 and 1986

5 The collection contains two tape-recorded interviews with Earlie Mae Wheeler. The tapes have been removed from the collection and placed in the Irving Archives Oral History Collection. The interviews can be found on tape numbers 051 and 294. Tape 294 is an interview conducted by Lanora L. Sanders, c. 1982. Tape 051 is an interview conducted in 1986 by Mildred Norman, Catie Morgan, and Irene Norman. Transcripts of the recordings can be found in this folder.