

Fall 2006

Llewena Baker Hill Mathews, 1900 - 1941

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University of Southern Maine

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African American Collection of Maine

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The African American Collection of Maine
welcomes donations of materials on African
American life in Maine.

The African American Collection of Maine is
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From the Editor's Desk



The 2006-2007 academic year has a bittersweet beginning. As always, the fall brings the promise, potential, and energy of a new year. However, this optimism is tempered by the recent loss of someone very special to the African American Collection of Maine. Lucille Sheppard, a member of the Collection's advisory board and a faithful supporter of Collection programming, passed away on August 14. Lucille Sheppard lived in the Portland area for decades and contributed greatly to its cultural, educational, and organizational life. As we continue to explore the history of African Americans in various Maine cities, the theme of this year's *Griot* and of the 2007 annual exhibition is Black Portland. We dedicate both to the memory of Lucille Sheppard. She will be sorely missed.

—Maureen Elgersman Lee, *associate professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Collection of Maine at USM*

In Memoriam: Lucille T. Sheppard

Lucille Sheppard was born in New York City. Lucille Sheppard was incredibly proud of her heritage and honored her maternal roots in Georgetown, Guyana. An intelligent, articulate, and dignified woman, Lucille Sheppard had this same message of pride for those around her. Married to former Tuskegee Airman and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector James Sheppard, Lucille lived in Maine for more than 30 years. Lucille Sheppard was a well-traveled woman. However, if she were at home, she could be counted on to support Collection programming—be it an opening reception, a scholarly lecture, or a film presentation.

Known best to many for her pioneering work in helping to establish USM's Senior Adult Growth Exchange (SAGE) program, for the past few years, Lucille Sheppard served faithfully on the African American Collection's advisory board. In

November 2005, as a sign of their support, Lucille and James Sheppard donated a limited edition, signed copy of Robert Bailey's print, "Red Tail Pass" that honors the Tuskegee Airmen's victorious air campaign over Germany in the spring of 1945. For her role in the donation, Lucille's actions embodied the love and respect she had for her husband, her pride in her race, and her commitment to strengthening the African American Collection of Maine.

Lucille Sheppard's passing has left an almost palpable void in the local African American community. However, at Sheppard's memorial service, friend Shalom Odokara offered consolation when she called Lucille Sheppard a water lily so beautiful that when God looked down from heaven, He wanted her for Himself.

A Place in Time: Llewena Baker Hill Mathews, 1900-1941

There are many individuals of note in the history of Portland's Black community. One woman with a particularly captivating story is Llewena Baker Hill. A Portland native and the daughter of a Maine-born father and a New Brunswick-born mother, Llewena Baker Hill went on to become one of the University of Southern Maine's earliest African American alumni. Hill graduated from Gorham Normal School in 1921, and soon entered the local workforce. According to the 1922 edition of the Normal School's yearbook and to her obituary, Hill had a

short-lived career as an elementary teacher. Whether the brevity of her career

was due to local employment trends or to the state's aversion to Black teachers is not clear.¹

Before Llewena Hill graduated from college, however, she had already made history as one of the more than 60 charter members of the Portland branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The branch—a first for both the city of Portland and the state of Maine—was chartered in 1920. NAACP documents reveal that Hill's



Llewena Hill as she appeared in the 1921 Gorham Normal School yearbook.
Photo: University Archives, Special Collections,
University of Southern Maine Library

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Calendar of Events

Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine 2006 annual exhibition,
“Liberating Visions: Religion and the Challenge of Change in Maine, 1820-Present.”
October 26, 2006 through January 26, 2007
Glickman Family Library
USM Portland campus

African American Collection of Maine 2007 annual exhibition,
“Black Portland.”
February 1, 2007 through April 15, 2007.
Opening reception, February 2, 2007, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Glickman Family Library
USM Portland campus

save
THESE
dates

Llewena Baker Hill Mathews continued

mother, Sarah McCarthy Hill, was also a charter member. Sarah Hill was no stranger to organizational activity. She was active in the Black women’s club movement of the early 1900s and had served as a vice-president of the Northeastern Federation of Women’s Clubs (NFWC). Sarah Hill’s service in the NFWC may help explain her daughter’s position as the Portland NAACP’s assistant secretary.²

By the time Llewena Hill married Oscar S. Mathews in 1926, she had left teaching and taken work as an elevator

operator, one of the few jobs outside of domestic work consistently available to Black women in Portland. According to the Portland City Directory, Llewena Hill Mathews operated the elevator at the Chapman Building on Congress Street. Tragically, Llewena Hill Mathews died in December of 1941, several days after giving birth to twins—a daughter and a son. This son, well-known member of the Portland community, James Mathews, would eventually serve as president of the NAACP’s Portland branch.³

¹ *Green and White*, 1921, 1922, University Archives, Special Collections, University of Southern Maine Library. Birth record of Llewena Baker Hill, May 1900, Maine State Archives, Augusta; Obituary of Llewena Hill Mathews, December 1941, *Portland Evening Express*.

² “Women’s Federation of Northeast Meet,” *New York Age*, 15 July 1915; Application for Charter of Portland, Maine Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, April 1920, NAACP Branch Files-Portland, Maine, Library of Congress; Arthur H. Edwards to Robert W. Bagnall, 18 November 1922, NAACP Branch Files-Portland, Maine, Library of Congress.

³ Marriage record of Oscar S. Mathews, Jr. and Llewena Baker Hill, 1926, Maine State Archives, Augusta; *Portland City Directory*, 1926; Obituary of Llewena Hill Mathews, December 1941, *Portland Evening Express*.

In Review

The following books were recently reviewed in the *Journal of African American History* and may be of interest to readers of the *Griot*.

Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

[Reviewed by Clarence Lang, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]

Scholars including Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Robin D.G. Kelley shine the light on local civil rights struggles that took place in the northeastern, midwestern, and western United States.

Kimberly Springer. *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*. Duke University Press, 2005.

[Reviewed by Duchess Harris, Macalester College]

Springer asks and answers the central question, “How do Black women and their race and gender interests fit into the historical narrative of Black and women’s liberation?”

Please note that *The Griot* will now be produced twice per year—spring and fall.