

Collection #
M1496
OM0764
CT2610-2618

JEAN E. SPEARS FAMILY PAPERS
ADDITION, CA. 1900-2009

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 3 manuscript boxes, 2 oversize manuscript folders, 1 half size box of cold storage color photographs, 5 folders photographs, 2 folders OVB photographs, 1 folder OVC photographs, 1 folder OVA graphics, 1 bin 35mm polyester negatives, 5 video cassette tapes, 9 audio cassette tapes, 1 artifact

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1900-2009

PROVENANCE: Lucia M. Spears, M.D. Phoenix, AZ

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: This collection is an addition to Jean E. Spears Family Papers, M0488.

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2015.0315, 2020.0075

NOTES: Materials in cold storage need at least 4 hours to acclimate, so patrons should call ahead if they wish to view materials that are in cold storage.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Spears family has been resident in Indianapolis for three generations, beginning with Jean Spears' father Louis Joseph Douglas and his wife, Marion Elizabeth Brabham Douglas Burch. Jean Spears was born in Indianapolis 18 February 1925. In 1946, Jean married Sherman J. Polley Jr. (1918- 2016). The couple had three children, one of whom died in infancy. The surviving children were Claudia Anne Polley (1949-) and John Evan Polley (1952-). Jean and Sherman Polley were divorced in 1952. In 1956, she married John Holliday Spears (1919-1969), an Indianapolis native and reporter for *The Indianapolis Star*. Jean and John Spears had one child, Lucia Marion Spears (1957-).

Jean Spears attended Crispus Attucks High School, graduating in 1942. She continued her education at Purdue University, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics. Spears taught grade school, and was involved in many community projects. Jean Spears has been called an urban pioneer, a mother, a grandmother, and a "history lady". She was a historian and preservationist, and she was very active in historical projects around Indianapolis. She worked with the Indiana Avenue Association on its project to encourage the renovation of the avenue and to attract black businesses to the area. She was instrumental in establishing Ransom Place as a protected historic district in 1992, preventing demolition of its buildings during a canal development dispute, protecting it from gentrification, and allowing it to survive to this day. She moved a building to Ransom Place and turned it into the Heritage Learning Center, where she would continue her work. She involved herself in plans to improve Indianapolis, specifically with the renovation of Monument Circle, turning it into the city center it is today, as well as with the Lockerbie Square Historic Preservation Plan. She also wrote papers and manuscripts about the histories of people, homes, and places, most notably of Madam C. J. Walker. For her efforts, she was one of ten Hoosiers to receive the Indiana Jefferson Award in 1997. She is active within the Witherspoon United Presbyterian Church, where she taught Sunday School for many years. She has also been active in the Indianapolis Urban League, the Presbyterian Church's Urban Guild and the Community Action Against Poverty project.

Jean's husband, John Holliday Spears, was also a native of Indianapolis. He attended Crispus Attucks High School and Butler University, from which he graduated in 1950 with a degree in journalism. His university career was interrupted by World War II. Mr. Spears served in Italy and was awarded the Purple Heart. He worked as a reporter for *The Indianapolis Star* and later at the Fort Harrison Finance Center.

Jean Spears had two children by her first marriage, Claudia Anne Polley and John Evan Polley. Claudia Polley attended Interlochen Arts Academy until her graduation in 1967. She then attended the Juilliard School in New York City, where she finished her vocal training. Claudia has since appeared in concert and in performances of musicals many times, as well as working in radio and television. Claudia has also done charitable work and has been as active as her mother in the black community. She has two children, Amanda Elizabeth Polley (1973-) and Evan Lawrence Polley (1982-). Amanda Elizabeth Polley married Jeffrey King and had a son, Duncan Earl Louis King in 2006.

John Evan Polley was born in Indianapolis in 1952. He attended Shortridge High School, Dartmouth College (from which he graduated cum laude) and Harvard Law School. Since finishing his law degree he has worked for Baker and Daniels, Continental Airlines and Indianapolis Methodist Hospital.

Lucia Marion Spears, the daughter of Jean and John Holliday Spears, was born in Indianapolis in 1957. She attended Shortridge High School, from which she graduated in 1975. Lucia received her M.D. from Howard School of Medicine in 1983. She also holds the rank of Lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Sources:

Spears Family Papers Collection Guide, M0488.

Materials in the collection.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection addition to the Jean E. Spears Family Papers contains personal documents and photographs belonging to Jean E. Spears which document her interest in family history and Indiana Black history as well as items related to her work in historic preservation, specifically around Ransom Place, Indiana Avenue and Lockerbie Square in Indianapolis.

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January 1982

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