



Washington School (Caruthersville, Mo.) Collection (CG0080)

Collection Number: CG0080

Collection Title: Washington School (Caruthersville, Mo.) Collection

Dates: 1955-1989, 2025, n.d.

Creator: Dr. Tamara M. Cooke Henry

Abstract: This collection consists of materials related to the Booker T. Washington High School in Caruthersville, Mo. This includes a copy of the yearbook from 1955, a brief history of the school and the Black community in Caruthersville, several photographs and stills from home videos made by and of Dr. Francis Wardell Cooke, and a funeral program for Dr. Cooke. The digital items include three home videos made by Dr. Cooke, which depict a baptism in the 1950s, the graduation ceremony for the class of 1955, and a joint meeting between Black and White educators in the 1950s or 1960s. There are also three episodes of a podcast created by Dr. Henry, which cover the annual reunion held by former students of Washington School in the year 2025, reminiscing about their time as students.

Collection Size: 0.2 cubic feet, 36.6GB
(6 folders, 4 flash drives)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Cape Girardeau](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at capegirardeau@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *B.T. Washington School (Caruthersville, Mo.) Collection* (CG0080); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Cape Girardeau [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Cape Girardeau].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Dr. Tamara M. Cooke Henry on July 17, 2025 (Accession No. CGA0075).

Processed by: Processed by Ann Lowe, 2025

Historical Note:

Booker T. Washington High School was founded in 1931 by Charles J. Lunderman, the first principal, who persuaded graduating 8th grade students from Washington School to remain and form a 9th grade class in the fall. The original building was a four-room building at 18th Street and Compress Road, with a nearby three-room shotgun house serving as the home economics building. There were four teachers: Mrs. Lucy Williams, Mrs. M. M. Cunningham, Miss Fields, and Ms. B. R. C. Parker.

In 1932 the 7th-9th grades and the music classes moved to the Methodist church across the street from the original building. The school continued to expand as Mr. Lunderman recruited students from nearby communities like Hayti and Deering, and in 1934 Washington officially became a four-year high school. The school graduated its first senior class in 1935, with nine students. In 1937 the WPA completed a new high school building, and the following spring a class of 15 students graduated from that new building. The shop building, the first on campus to have indoor restrooms, was finished in 1951.

In 1955, a new elementary school building was built on the southern part of campus. Integration began in 1964, with two Washington High School students moving to the White high school. In 1967, the Caruthersville schools fully integrated, and Washington became a junior high school. When it eventually closed, the property was first sold to Caruthersville Cotton Warehouse, and then later to Lincoln University. In 2006, all four original buildings were destroyed by a tornado. One building was rebuilt on its old foundation, and in 2011 the Washington School Reunion Inc. erected a monument to honor the school's history and legacy.

Arrangement:

This collection has been arranged into a single series, organized alphabetically by folder title.

Scope and Content Note:

This collection contains materials related to B.T. Washington High School in Caruthersville, Mo. The materials are a mix of physical and digital items. The physical items consist of a brief history of the school and Black community life in that time period in Caruthersville; a photo of the B.T. Washington School campus in 1955 (the same as the image on the yearbook cover); several photos of the school buildings and a local movie theater in 1989; the monument that was erected in memory of the B.T. Washington School; and the refurbished building that is used by Lincoln University as an outreach center.

The digital items are contained on four flash drives. These files include three home videos made by Dr. Cooke, all of which are filmed in color but without any audio. One video depicts a baptism in the 1950s at an unspecified pond in the Caruthersville area. One video records the graduation ceremony for the class of 1955, showing the students entering the auditorium, and then afterwards when the students and families exit the auditorium. The final video shows a joint meeting between Black and White educators in the 1950s or 1960s. The remainder of the digital files all relate to three episodes of a podcast created by Dr. Henry, which cover the annual reunion held by former students of the Washington School in the year 2025, reminiscing about their time as students.

Container List:

- f. 1 Brief history of Black community and school in Caruthersville (Mo.), 2025
- f. 2 Dr. Francis W. Cooke funeral program, 1997
- f. 3 Dr. Francis W. Cooke photos and Deloise Williams photo, n.d.
- f. 4 Podcast biographical notes and show write-up, 2025
- f. 5 School building photos, 1955, 1989
- f. 6 B.T. Washington High School yearbook (copy), 1955
- b.d.f. 7 (*Digital*) Missouri Life (21 still images, 3 home videos: Baptism, 1955 graduation, BOE meeting), 1955, n.d.
- b.d.f. 8 (*Digital*) Former students at monument, 2025
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