



## Gladys Coggsell Papers (C4794)

**Collection Number:** C4794

**Collection Title:** Gladys Coggsell Papers

**Dates:** 1978-2009

**Creator:** Coggsell, Gladys, 1943-

**Abstract:** The papers of a Frankford, Missouri, storyteller, educator, folklorist, and singer include correspondence, miscellaneous personal papers, newspaper clippings, photographs, folklore stories and other professional materials, and audiovisual performance recordings.

**Collection Size:** 2.4 cubic feet, 51 audio cassettes, 21 video cassettes, 5 CDs, 2 oversize items (120 folders)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

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

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**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Gladys Coggsell Papers* (C4794); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

**Donor Information:** The records were donated to the University of Missouri by Gladys Coggsowell on September 22, 2005 (Accession No. CA6083). Additions were made on September 14 and October 19, 2005, April 17, 2006, and March 31, 2010 (Accession Nos. CA6083.01-.04).

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the Gladys Coggsowell Papers can be found in the following collections:

[Missouri Folklore Society Records](#), (C2045)

[Bootheel Project Records](#), (C3928)

[Chez Coffeehouse \(Columbia, Mo.\) Collection](#), (C4756)

**Processed by:** Autumn Cuddy, May 6, 2026

### **Historical Note:**

Gladys Caines was born in 1943 and raised in Patterson, New Jersey. Throughout her childhood, she heard fables, folktales, and family stories from her great grandparents, Pete and Marie Wallace Cofer. From this experience, she developed her own passion for storytelling, which her husband, Truman Coggsowell, encouraged further.

The Coggsowells moved to Missouri in 1974 after a chance stop during a northeast Missouri camping trip resulted in Gladys falling in love with the town of Frankford. There, she was introduced to the oral tradition of the Black residents around Hannibal and Louisiana, which prompted her to engage more deeply in the preservation and perpetuation of Missouri's African American history and storytelling culture.

In 1979, Coggsowell volunteered with the Reading Is Fundamental education program, promoting literacy with her oral storytelling tradition. From this, she gained enough reputation for booking requests to come her way. Alongside this work, Gladys pursued her own education, picking up where she left off after dropping out of high school, going on to earn her GED and degrees from St. Louis Community College (A.A., 1979), Washington University (B.A., 1981), and University of Missouri-St. Louis (M.A. Education-Counseling, 1991). Although she did find work in the counseling field, Coggsowell left in the early 1990s and turned to a full-time career in her longtime passion, storytelling.

In addition to storytelling performances, Coggsowell hosts workshops, researches and writes pieces on particular people and areas, records oral histories, and publishes books. *Why There Are No Dragons*, a cautionary tale about Queen Fumebreath, was published in 1996. In 2009, Coggsowell published *Stories from the Heart: Missouri's African American Heritage*, a collection of family stories and tales. Recordings of her storytelling were released on audio cassettes in the 1990s, including the *A Story, A Story* series and *Well Shut My Mouth*.

Gladys Caines Coggsowell was a regular participant in the Missouri Folk Arts Program's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, where she apprenticed to Mae "Lady Jazz" Wheeler in 1988 and was a featured master artist 7 times between 1992 and 2004. In 2005, she received the Missouri Arts Award as an Individual Artist from the Missouri Arts Council for her legacy and

lasting contributions to the arts. She was the first Black president of the Missouri Folklore Society and founded By Word of Mouth, the first regional storytelling guild in northeast Missouri.

**Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into the following 11 series:

- Correspondence
- Events
- Oral History
- Organizations
- Personal
- Publicity
- Research
- Stories
- Writings
- Audiovisual Materials
- Oversized Items

**Scope and Content Note:**

**Correspondence**

This series contains personal and professional correspondence to and from Coggsowell, 1984-2005.

**Events**

This series consists of materials pertaining to performances, classes, conferences, workshops, festivals, and miscellaneous storytelling events, 1982-2005.

**Oral History**

This series contains materials related to oral history projects undertaken by Coggsowell with students and adults from 2000-2003 and the Bootheel project, conducted jointly with the State Historical Society of Missouri to document the stories of Black residents, 1994.

**Organizations**

This series consists of materials pertaining to organizations Coggsowell founded or participated in, including the storytelling guild she founded and a number of state, regional, and national storyteller organizations, 1981-2005.

**Personal**

This series contains Coggswell's personal papers, awards, family records, and photographs, 1970s-2005.

### **Publicity**

This series consists of marketing materials and press regarding Coggswell's speaking engagements and storytelling events, 1974-2004.

### **Research**

This series contains research notes and reference material on African American and Missouri history as well as the art and methodology of storytelling, arranged alphabetically by subject, 1965-2005.

### **Stories**

This series consists of stories and story fragments collected from all over the world, including published and well-known stories, those written or performed by Coggswell, stories written or recorded by Boonville middle school students, and miscellaneous story fragments, largely undated and arranged in alphabetical order by title.

### **Writings**

This series contains materials used in the publication of story and song collections, as well as materials pertaining to the writing and publication of *By Word of Mouth*, arranged alphabetically and then by date, 1962-2003.

### **Audiovisual Materials**

This series consists of 51 audio cassettes, 21 video cassettes, and 5 CDs documenting Coggswell's storytelling, oral history interviews, auditions, TV and radio appearances, and miscellaneous events and programs, 1990s-2000s.

### **Oversized Items**

This series consists of one photograph of Gladys and Truman Coggswell, Sr., and one poster from the Missouri Arts Awards, 2005.

### **Container List:**

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- f. 48 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1996
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- f. 52 Missouri Folk Arts Program, Traditional Arts Apprenticeship, 1992-2004
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- f. 55 National Storytelling Association, China Trip, 1997

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- f. 72-75 African Americans
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- f. 77 African Americans, c. 1990s
- f. 78 Bootheel, Bowling Green, Clarksville, Frankford, 1941-1995
- f. 79-80 Hannibal, 1983-2003
- f. 81 Lewis County, Louisiana, Pennytown, 1986-1997
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- f. 83 St. Louis, 1970s
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- f. 101 "The Sun and the Moon," Gladys Coggsweil, 2009
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### Audiovisual Materials

- a.c. 1 Folklife Fest, 1991
- a.c. 2 "Gathering," 8<sup>th</sup> & Center, November 10, 1991
- a.c. 3 African American Storytelling, Coggsell et al, Columbia, March 18, 1993
- a.c. 4 Storytime, "Baboon & Zebra," January 24, 1994
- a.c. 5 Dorine Ambers, Hannibal, Mo., July 1994
- a.c. 6 Jerry Grimmett, Bowling Green, Mo., July 1994
- a.c. 7 Storytime, "Godfather Death," August 8, 1994
- a.c. 8 Storytime, Judy Domini, August 18, 1994
- a.c. 9 Storytime, "The Bat," September 12, 1994
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- a.c. 11 Storytime, "A Precious Life," November 7, 1994
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- a.c. 13 Storytime, "The Ant Story," March 27, 1995
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- a.c. 23 Storytime, "The Owl Story," August 25, 1997
- a.c. 24 Storytime, "The Mule of Faith," September 1, 1997
- a.c. 25 Storytime, "Valient Vicky," March 23, 1998
- a.c. 26 Storytime, "The Wooden Chair," July 21, 1998
- a.c. 27 Interviews, Dorine, Lillian, Major, April 20, 2000
- a.c. 28 Interviews, Evelyn Pulliam Kennet, May 2, 2000
- a.c. 29 Interview, St. Louis, May 4, 2000
- a.c. 30 Interview, Sedalia, June 27, 2000
- a.c. 31 Missouri Folklore Society Apprenticeship Program demo tape, Loretta Washington, August 25, 2001
- a.c. 32-33 *A Story, A Story 1*, Gladys Coggsell, 1990s [2 copies]
- a.c. 34-35 *A Story, A Story 2*, Gladys Coggsell, 1990s [2 copies]
- a.c. 36-37 *Well Shut My Mouth*, Gladys Coggsell, 1990s [2 copies]
- a.c. 38 Auditions, Tape 6, undated
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- a.c. 44 Interview, Lillian Jones, undated

- a.c. 45 *Charms for the Easy Life*, Tape 1, undated
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- a.c. 47 *Gospel Tones*, Willow Street Christian Church, undated
- a.c. 48 MoMo & Joe Lewis, He's Our Guy, undated
- a.c. 49 *Songs from Potter's Field*, Ray Boltz
- a.c. 50 "Sing Along," undated
- a.c. 51 *Stories from Southern Africa*, undated
- v.c. 1 "Storytelling in the Classroom," March 16, 1993
- v.c. 2 *Ain't Misbehavin'*, January 19, 1994
- v.c. 3 PBS special, Gladys Coggsweil on Mrs. Dred Scott, 1994
- v.c. 4 *A Slave's Wife: Harriet Robinson Scott*, by Gladys Coggsweil, September 7, 1994
- v.c. 5-8 "The 1997 People to People Storytelling Delegation to the People's Republic of China"
- v.c. 9 Ozarks TV Watch Series, McCann "Archive" – TV News; Ozark Storytelling; Jam Sessions & Jig Dancing; Textiles, 2001
- v.c. 10 Gladys Coggsweil, Springfield, Illinois, October 19, 2002
- v.c. 11 AME Church with Deb & Truman, undated
- v.c. 12 Dorine Ambers, Lillian Jones, Major Griggsby, undated
- v.c. 13 Evelyn Pulliam's Life Story, undated
- v.c. 14 *The Firestarters: Creating Community Movement for Change* with Don Coyhis, undated
- v.c. 15 KETC/Channel 9, *Black Artistry: The Tradition Continues*, undated
- v.c. 16 *Kids Do Think!* #1, undated
- v.c. 17 *Kids Do Think!* #2, undated
- v.c. 18 KSDK, Gladys Coggsweil, March 25, no year
- v.c. 19 PBS Special, Gladys Coggsweil, undated
- v.c. 20 *Song of the South*, undated
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- CD 1 *Prairie Tales: The New Salem Storytelling Festival Sampler*, 2003
- CD 2-3 "African American Stories in Missouri: The Oral Tradition Today," Missouri Folklore Society, Storytelling Remembrance, November 8, 2008
- CD 4 *Spiritual Heirs*, Mett Morris & Gladys Coggsweil, June 2009
- CD 5 Speech, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection reception, September 12, 2009

### Oversized Items

- item 1 Photograph, Gladys and Truman Coggsweil, Sr., c. 2004
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