

FINDING AID: Mrs. Lucinda Todd papers

Repositories

Kansas State Historical Society (Topeka)

Title

Mrs. Lucinda Todd papers

Dates

1922-2007

Quantity

1 cubic foot box
1 oversize folder

Abstract

The Lucinda Todd papers document her activities during the civil rights movement, including her involvement with *Oliver Brown, et al., v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et al.*, and information about Martin Luther King, Jr. The papers include clippings from the Kansas City star, Topeka daily capital, & other papers concerning *Brown v. Board* & segregation; academic records such as diplomas & transcripts; correspondence to Milton Tabor concerning his portrayal of Harrison Caldwell & herself; correspondence with Walter Francis White regarding segregation & the activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); correspondence with individuals concerning racism & segregation in Topeka public schools; records of her involvement with the NAACP; and clippings & correspondence documenting early desegregation efforts. Records after the 1960s are reflective in nature, including family histories, articles discussing the impact of *Brown v. Board*, and recognitions from the NAACP and other groups. The photographs of Todd include photographs of classes she taught.

Biographical Sketch

[“Biography of Lucinda Wilson-Todd” in the collection]

Lucinda Todd was born in a small coal mining camp called Litchfield, in Crawford County, Kansas, in 1903. Her parents had been part of the post Civil War exodus of African Americans from the South into Kansas. Mr. Slaughter, Lucinda’s grandfather, moved the entire family from southern Alabama. Already married, her parents joined the move. Lucinda’s mother, Estella, was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and her father, Charles R. Wilson, was born in Georgia.

Since the Wilson family lived and worked the coal mines in a small, second-class city, by population, Kansas law permitted the community’s public schools to be integrated. As a result, the twelve Wilson children were educated in a one-room elementary school attended by both African

American and White children. Kansas law of that era only permitted segregated elementary schools in first class cities of fifteen thousand or more residents.

When Lucinda reached the fifth grade, the family moved to Girard, Kansas, because in Litchfield there was no junior high or high school. After her high school graduation in 1922, she attended the Kansas State Teacher's College in nearby Pittsburg for several years. Prior to graduation, she took a teaching position in Joplin, Missouri, but continued her college education. In the late 1920s Lucinda moved to Topeka, Kansas. She taught at Buchanan Elementary School; one of her students was later the noted attorney Charles Scott. She eventually earned her bachelor of arts degree from Pittsburg State Teachers College in 1935, the same year she married Alvin Todd. However, she had to resign her teaching position, as married women could not teach during those days.

Alvin Todd was born October 10, 1906, in Oskaloosa, Kansas. His parents were from Missouri but passed away when he was very young; his mother died when he was nine years old. In 1916, he went to live with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas, where he attended New York Elementary School. They later moved to Oskaloosa where he continued his education, graduating from Oskaloosa High School in 1928. After graduation, Alvin moved to Topeka where he attended Washburn University for two years. He was always a good provider, supporting his family in the background while his wife participated as one of the key member of Topeka's NAACP chapter during the years of the *Brown v. Board* case. He finally retired from his position as a personal assistant to Dr. Karl Menninger in 1975.

Mrs. Todd had been a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1935, but admitted she did not become concerned about segregation issues until the birth of her only child, Nancy. In 1948, Lucinda became secretary of the Topeka chapter of the NAACP. That same year, Lucinda also became secretary of an *ad hoc* group called Citizens for Civil Rights, headquartered in her home. Their primary efforts surrounded a lengthy document called a "Writ of Mandamus" prepared by Mr. Daniel Sawyer that outlined a proposal to the Topeka Board of Education to end segregated elementary schools. As part of this effort, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fayette Sawyer walked through Topeka's Black neighborhoods collecting over 1,400 signatures in a petition to the Board of Education requesting an end to segregated elementary schools. The Board rejected their demands outright.

In 1949, Mr. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the national NAACP office, was making a 10 city speaking tour through several Midwestern cities. During his visit to Topeka, he was a guest of the Todd family. Mrs. Todd had the opportunity to discuss the segregated elementary school situation in Topeka and the efforts then underway.

As efforts by the local NAACP to desegregate Topeka's elementary schools had in Mrs. Todd's words, became unbearable, on August 29, 1950, Mrs. Todd wrote Walter White. In her letter, she reminded him that he had been a house guest the previous year and asked if his legal defense team could be of some assistance as the local chapter had already decided to seek redress through the courts. Letters from Topeka chapter officers McKinley Burnett and Attorney Charles Bledsoe quickly followed. Their efforts brought both the national Executive and Legal Defense Fund (LDF) teams to Topeka to work closely with the Topeka chapter of the NAACP in developing

legal strategies for a case soon to be called *Oliver Brown et al., v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Lucinda Todd's home became the site of the strategy meetings that set the wheels in motion for the *Brown* case. As part of their strategy, the legal team asked citizens to volunteer as plaintiffs for the upcoming court case. Lucinda Todd was the first of twelve other Topekans to volunteer on behalf of her daughter Nancy. Mrs. Todd was the only plaintiff who was a member of the NAACP and the only educator. The second to volunteer was her friend Mrs. Lena Carper on behalf of her daughter Cathy.

After the U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1954 ending legal segregation in public schools, Mrs. Todd returned to teaching. Her first teaching job was at Pierce Addition Elementary School; the last segregated elementary school in Topeka. She retired in 1965. Mrs. Todd passed away in 1996.

Index Terms

Individual subjects:

- King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
- Todd, Lucinda Wilson, 1903-1996
White, Walter Francis, 1893-1955

Corporate names:

- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

General Subjects:

- African American women civil rights workers -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka
- Civil rights -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka
Civil rights movements -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka
Segregation -- (z)United States
Segregation -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka
Segregation in education -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka
Elementary school teachers -- (z)Kansas -- (z)Topeka

Restrictions

None