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**Edith Mitchell Dabbs Papers**

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The Papers of Edith Mitchell Dabbs

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# EDITH MITCHELL DABBS

## PAPERS

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1906 Nov. 10 Born Dalzell, S.C., daughter of John Hampton and Vermelle Wells Mitchell
- 1927 Graduated Coker College, B.A. degree in English and Latin
- 1927-1932 High school teacher in S.C.
- 1935 Married James McBride Dabbs of Mayesville, SC, and moved to Rip Raps Plantation
- 1951 Attended National Communications Institute in New York City
- 1952 Produced *No Place To Play* about Robbins Trailer Camp near Aiken, the first documentary on trailer housing made in U.S.  
Reported for Associated Press International, United Press International, and Religious News Service  
Involved in establishment of Camp Care on Johns Island, one of first migrant day care centers in region
- 1964 Publication of *Walking Tall*, a brief history of Penn School
- 1965 James Dabbs appointed chairman of Penn Community Services, Inc.
- 1970 James Dabbs died
- 1970 Publication of *Face of an Island*
- 1971 Honorary trustee of Penn Community Services, Inc.
- 1972 Edited *Haunted by God*, published posthumously for James Dabbs
- 1977 Honorary Doctor of Humanities, Francis Marion College
- 1978 National Valiant Woman Award from Church Women United and World Who's Who of Women
- 1979 Life Member of Southern Regional Council in Atlanta
- 1983 Publication of *Sea Island Diary*
- 1991 Feb. 28 Died

## EDITH MITCHELL DABBS PAPERS

### SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers of Edith Mitchell Dabbs (1906-1991) span the years 1791 to 1997 but the bulk of the papers date 1920 to 1980. Included in the collection are correspondence, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and notes. Units of materials reflect Dabbs' interest in the history of Penn School on St. Helena Island, and her desire to see it publicized.

The primary focus of the collection is material compiled about Penn School and St. Helena Island by Dabbs. A native South Carolinian, Dabbs began her association with the school in 1960 when her husband, James McBride Dabbs (1896-1970), became a trustee of Penn Community Services, Inc. During trips to the island for meetings, Edith spent her time with the people who lived there, learning about them, the island, and the school. After James' death, Edith was made an honorary trustee and became custodian of the school's archive. Three publications resulted from Dabbs' appreciation of the island: *Walking Tall* (1964), *Face of an Island*, (1970) , and *Sea Island Diary* (1983). Most of the material in the collection pertains to her research for the latter book. Two later additions to the collection contain more research materials for her books as well as personal correspondence with family and friends, especially letters of condolence on the death of James in May 1970.

Edith Mitchell graduated from Coker College in 1929 and taught in various South Carolina high schools. After marrying James Dabbs in 1935, she became involved with raising a family and helping with the Dabbs plantation, Rip Raps, at Mayesville near Sumter. James Dabbs, head of the English Department at Coker College, became well known in the literary world for his writings on the South and in the civil rights world through his work as president of the Southern Regional Council. Like James, Edith held strong convictions about the rights of the under-privileged and the importance of the civil rights movement. Edith gave her time to different organizations, such as Church Women United, and she was made a life member of the Southern Regional Council.

The collection is arranged in three series: papers, persons, and topical. The first series includes Dabbs' personal correspondence, correspondence about and drafts of her publications, and early writings. The persons series contains notes and correspondence regarding St. Helena Island residents or information about the island. Under topical are Dabbs' research notes on Beaufort, Penn School, and St. Helena Island for *Sea Island Diary*. There is also a small card file drawer with additional topical research notes. Seven uncut copies of *Home of the Freed* (1926) by Rossa Cooley and an undated oversize photograph taken at Penn Community Services, Inc. accompany the collection. The additional material is arranged by personal correspondence and photographs, research materials and publication/promotion correspondence for *Face of an Island*, and research and photographs for *Sea Island Diary*.

## EDITH MITCHELL DABBS PAPERS

### DESCRIPTION OF SERIES

- Box 1 Papers, 1936-1982 & un dated  
Includes personal correspondence, drafts and correspondence regarding her three publications, and examples of early writing attempts.
- Box 1-2  
**Persons**  
Organized alphabetically by individual and family surname, this series contains information on St. Helena Island residents, people associated with Penn School, and researchers with information about Penn School or St. Helena; includes original correspondence, copies of correspondence and land papers, and notes on newspaper articles.
- Box 2-3  
**Topical, 1859-1982& undated**  
Materials relating to Dabbs' research on St. Helena Island; arranged in the following subseries: African-American Culture, Beaufort, Civil War, Natural Disasters, Penn School, and St. Helena; includes original and duplicated correspondence, newspaper clippings, articles, original Penn School materials, and notes on newspaper articles.
- Box4  
**Personal correspondence and photographs, 1918-1997& undated**  
Letters and mailings to and from Edith Dabbs as well as Dabbs family correspondence and S.C. Council of Church Women materials. A significant portion of materials is letters, telegrams, and cards of condolence to Edith on James' death in May 1970. Correspondents include George McGovern, Septima P. Clark, Vernon E. Jordan, J r., John Edgerton, Anne King Gregorie, and Rebecca Reid. Of interest is folder of materials sent to teachers from Citizens Committee to Preserve American Freedoms, regarding California teachers called before House Un-American Committee in 1959. Also included is typescript of *Sea Island Diary*.
- Box5
- Box-6 7  
***Face of an Island* research and publication**  
Research notes, research photographs, and correspondence regarding publication and promotion of book. Includes scrapbook documenting sale and reception of book
- Sea Island Diary* research**  
Research notes, some original manuscript material, and original and copy photographs. Of note are cartes-de-visite by Hubbard & Mix and Blauvelt & Hubbard of Beaufort and Camp Saxton during Union occupation, stereograph halves of St. Helena Island views, and Penn Center images including dedication of Cope Industrial Building, 1912.

EDITH MITCHELL DABBS PAPERS

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1		Folder Number
	Papers	
	Personal Correspondence, 1968-1979, n.d.	1
	Publications, <u>Face of a Island</u> , Correspondence, 1965-1980, n.d.	2
	<u>Sea Island Diary</u> , Correspondence, 1964-1982, n.d.	3
	Draft I	4
	Draft II	-5 6
	Draft III	7-8
	Final Draft	9-10
	Funding	11
	Notes	12
	<u>Walking Tall</u> , Correspondence and Drafts, 196-2 1971, n.d.	13
	Writings, 1936-1937, n.d.	14
	Persons	
	Andrews, Elizabeth	15
	Blake, Herman	]6
	Brimijoin, Kay	17
	Burns, Betsy Jacoway	18
	B, misc.	19
	Chaplin Family	20
	Cooley, Rossa B.	21
	Cope Family	22
	C-E, misc.	23
	Fripp Family	24
	Frissell, Hollis Burke	25
	F, misc.	26
Box 2	Gannett, William Channing	27
	House, Grace B.	28
	Diary	29
	H-K, misc.	30
	Murray, Ellen	31
	M-N, misc.	32
	Peabody, George Foster	33
	P-R, misc.	34
	Sams Family	35
	Smalls, Robert	36
	S, misc.	37
	Thorpe, David F.	38
	Diary	39
	Towne, Laura M.	40
	Diary	41

	Topical		
		African-American Culture, 1872-1969, n.d.	43
		Beaufort	
		Churches, 1859-1971, n.d.	44
		Colonial, 1924-1971, n.d.	45
		Forts, 1908-1974, n.d.	46
		General, 1871-1980, n.d.	47
		Industry, 1882-1970, n.d.	48
		Islands, 1907-1981, n.d.	49
		Maps	51
		Obituaries, 1883-1936	51
		Civil War, 1860-1968, n.d.	52
		Natural Disasters	
		1886-1896	53
		1911	54
		1928-1940	55
		Penn School	
		Administrative	
Box3		Annual Meetings, 1012-1913, 1920-1931, 1979	56
		Annual Reports, 1890-1898, 1931-1932, 1951, n.d.	57
		Board of Trustees	
		General, 1900-1948	58
		Minutes, 1903, 1912, 1916, 1919-1929	59
		1930-1939, 1943-1949	60
		Committees	61
		Copyright, 1968-1979	62
		Executive Committee, Minutes, 1927-1936	63
		Exhibits, 1973-1978	64
		Papers, General, 1903-1980, n.d.	65
		Southern Historical Collection, U.N.C.	
		1963-June 1975	66
		Aug. 1976-1981, n.d.	67
		Teachers' Materials and Reports	68
		Alumni	69
		Anniversaries, 1912 & 1937	70
		Benezet Society	71
		Clubs	72
		Exhibition Day, 1910-1934, n.d.	73
		Facilities, 1864-1958, n.d.	74
		Fortner Bill, 1914, n.d.	75
		Movies, 1929-1971	76
		Museum, 1953-1972	77
		Papers, General, 1892-1982, n.d.	78
		Port Royal Experiment	79
		Programs	
		Better Homes, 1923-1933, n.d.	80
		Community Development, 1928-1929, 1948-1949, n.d.	81
		Farmers' Conference and Fair, 1904-1935, n.d.	82
		General, 1922-1980, n.d.	83
		Home Acre, 1917-1927	84

Trustees and Staff, 1928-1956, n.d. 85  
Visitors, 1911, 1926-1938, n.d. 86

St. Helena, Access, 1913-1970, n.d. 87  
Churches, 1790s-1960s, n.d. 88  
General, 1862-1954, n.d. 89  
Plantations 90

Seven volumes of Home of the Freed by Rossa B. Cooley (1926)

Box 4 Personal correspondence, 1918-1997, n.d.  
Photographs, 1954-1977, n.d.  
Council of Church Women, 1950-1975  
Typescript, *Sea Island Diary*  
California Teachers and HUAC, 1959

Box 5 Research notes and photographs, *Face of an Island*  
Microfilm, Penn Center Records, UNG-Chapel Hill  
Scrapbook, 1970-1979, publication of *Face of an Island*

Box 6 Research notes and original manuscripts, *Sea Island Diary*

Box 7 Research photographs and original photographs, *Sea Island Diary*

Oversize folder, MP, ca. 1914 and P, n.d.

Processed by: Elizabeth P. Bilderback Date completed: 25 Mar. 1994 Addition to collection:  
February 2003  
June 2004