

South Carolina Political Collections
University of South Carolina

Martha Monteith
(b.1921)
Papers, 1938 to 2016

Volume: .5 linear feet

Processed: 2018-2019, by Chauna Carr

Provenance: Donated by Martha Monteith

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Biographical Note:

Martha Elizabeth Cunningham Monteith dedicated her career to helping children with speech impediments and blazing a path for speech pathology programs in South Carolina's public education system.

Mrs. Monteith was born May 26, 1921 to Fanny Gilliam and the Reverend Dr. Bennie C. Cunningham, Sr. She grew up in Winnsboro, S.C. with her younger brother, Bennie Cunningham, Jr. The children attended the Fairfield County Training School. Both went on to attend Allen University in Columbia where Mrs. Monteith participated in many activities on campus, including the French and Dramatic clubs, and Student Government, and contributed to the university newspaper, *The Allen Journal*, as the society editor. She graduated Cum Laude, in 1942, with a Bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Elementary Education.



After graduation, Mrs. Monteith taught seventh grade social studies at Columbia's Carver School for one year, then taught third grade for about six years. At the same time, she began graduate at Howard University in Washington D.C., attending speech therapy classes over the summer. In 1949, following a series of transfers to four different universities, Mrs. Monteith received a Master of Arts degree in Speech Pathology from Western Reserve University, now Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio.

Having received her MA, Mrs. Monteith returned to Columbia as the first trained speech therapist employed by the S.C. public school system. She then established the first speech program in any public school in South Carolina, for Richland County School District One. The program started at Waverly Elementary and Booker T. Washington High Schools. It continued for forty-five years, encompassing the entirety of her tenure serving the District. Mrs. Monteith worked with lobbyists to secure state funding for speech and hearing services in the public schools of South Carolina, a landmark accomplishment for her profession.

Mrs. Monteith taught at South Carolina State University (SCSU) from 1954 to 1959 and 1961 to 1962. Concurrently, she assisted SCSU in establishing a department in Speech Pathology and Audiology. While teaching at SCSU she also taught reading in Allen's summer school. In 1966, as a member of the Curricula Committee at the University of South Carolina, she supported a proposition that would establish the graduate program in Speech Pathology and Audiology. In 1975, she joined the program's advisory board.



Mrs. Monteith did great work for her community as an activist and later as a benefactor. She participated in the civil rights movement by working on projects including the successful integration of the University of South Carolina in 1963 by her niece, Dr. Henrie Monteith Treadwell. She also worked to preserve sites of historical and educational significance including the Modjeska Monteith Simkins home and the Monteith School, work that she undertook with partners at the Historic Columbia Foundation, the Eau Clair Community Council, and the

Booker T. Washington Foundation. Both sites have been placed on the National Historic Registry.



Mrs. Monteith was also active in professional organizations including the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the South Carolina Education Association of College Women. She participated as an early member of the, now, South Carolina Speech-Language-Hearing Association (SCSHA) and served as president of the Women's Auxiliary to the Palmetto Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association, alongside her husband, Dr. Henry D. Monteith. In 1975, she represented ASHA at a conference in Moscow where she reportedly sang "God Bless America" in the lobby of the Leningrad Hotel in St. Petersburg.

Mrs. Monteith married Dr. Henry D. Monteith, a well-known physician, banker, and community leader. From 1945 to 1980, Dr. Monteith was president of the Victory Savings Bank, the first African-American owned bank in South Carolina. His sister, Modjeska Simkins, was one of the founding members of the bank. Both Mrs. Monteith and Mrs. Simkins assisted with various aspects of bank operations. Throughout

their marriage, Mrs. Monteith actively participated in much of her husband's work, helping him during nightly home visits as a physician, promoting the many services offered by the Victory Savings Bank within the community, and serving with him on the board for the Palmetto Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association.



In 1987, Mrs. Monteith retired as the South Carolina District One coordinator of Speech Pathology. In retirement, she has travelled the world with her niece, Dr. Henrie Monteith Treadwell, visiting places such as Egypt, Germany, Holland, Israel, and Zimbabwe. In 2008, Mrs. Monteith received the “Honors of the Association” award from ASHA, its highest honor, in recognition of her leadership and service. As a climax to a long and fruitful career, Mrs. Monteith was inducted into the Richland County School District One Hall of Fame in 2013.

Scope and Content Note:

The collection consists of about .5 linear foot of material, 1938 to 2016, arranged in four series: General, Monteith School Cultural Center, Photographs, and Clippings, each organized chronologically.

Mrs. Monteith's papers include documents covering the creation and implementation of the Speech Pathology program in Richland County District One and correspondence with Richland County administrators. There is also a collection of SCSHA's “In Touch” newsletter, 2006 to 2010, several items detailing Mrs. Monteith's work and accomplishments, undated handwritten notes, and other material from previous school committee and association work. The collection also includes several documents that Mrs. Monteith used as part of the advisory committee for the creation of the Monteith School Cultural Center. The collection has been digitized and is available online at the following [link](#).

Collection Inventory:

General:

1946-1958

1960-1976

1981-1986

2004-2013

No date

Monteith School Cultural Center

Photographs, 1938, 1942, n.d.

Clippings, 1942-2016, n.d.