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CAROLINIANA
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Grand Reopening

South Caroliniana Library is once again open to the public. And it's never looked better (pg. 16).

Nikky Finney

Her introduction to the Society at the 86th Annual Meeting on May 13, 2023

By Beryl Dakers

"The library to me is the second most sacred physical space on the planet," so says our guest, Nikky Finney. In the mid 1980s a relatively young Beryl had the opportunity to interview a definitely young poet. Her name was Nikky Finney. She arrived at the studio dressed in an outfit that suggested the feel of fatigues, complete with these — I guess — stylish combat boots. And she had hair, wonderful, expansive, plentiful hair everywhere. She was the physical embodiment of the positive messages of activism, questioning, and rebellion against the negatives of our society as celebrated in the groundbreaking theatrical production "Hair." It was all framing this sweet, gentle face which peeked out with just a hint of a smile. And I thought to myself, "Hmm. This is going to be interesting."

I was right. It was interesting, and within the first two minutes of the interview I knew that this young woman was going places. Nikky revealed herself to be an old soul camouflaged in a youthful persona. She spoke with an authority and wisdom far belying her youth, yet there was a wistfulness about her, an insatiable curiosity, an earnestness, if you will. Already, she told me, she had written probably hundreds of poems and hidden them away, carefully biding her time, waiting to extract them and share with the world at some later date.

You see, from an early age, she knew she would be a poet. You have her bio on the back of your agendas, and it was on your invitation, so I'm not going to detail her myriad accomplishments here — we'd be here until five o'clock. She was nurtured first by her incredible parents: Her mother, Frances, exposed her to the arts, and is with us today — Frances! *[Applause.]* I call her my fashion icon. Yes! — and her father, the late Ernest A. Finney Jr., chief justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court, both of whom instilled in Nikky her fierce sense of social justice and activism.

She was also nurtured by other great female poets: Lucille Clifton, Toni Cade Bambara, and Nikki Giovanni. They recognized that Nikky Finney was the real deal and encouraged her to publish her works and to keep on writing. A seeker of truth, a keeper of memories, a student of history, an astute observer, and a lover of words.

A voracious reader, she is one who recognized early on that words have meaning, words have power, words can help heal and bring us together. She was and is what another amazing poet, the wonderful Kwame Dawes, has called a grio, a priestess of the oral traditions, an emissary of the ancestors sent to help us get it all together. Embedded deeply in Nikky's works are images of the coast, the terrain, the traditions, the shapes, sounds, smells, colors, and, of course, the people of her beloved South Carolina, its history and memories kept alive and made relevant to the present.

"I wanted to be a poet who didn't shout, who said things but said them with the most beautiful attention to language." She believes we need to have the conversations, face the things we really need to be looking at, talk about hard things, but in a loving way.

For some thirty-plus years, by her own account, Nikky has worked to meet and perfect this challenge, exploring how these two paths intersect: the path where the beautifully said thing meets the really difficult to say thing; the path where they overlap, join together and become one. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the John H. Bennett Jr. Endowed Professor of Creative Writing and Southern Letters at the University of South Carolina and the executive director of the Ernest A. Finney, Jr. Cultural Arts Center, Ms. Nikky Finney.

[Applause.]

"The sensitive child has accidentally been locked inside the archives …"

By Nikky Finney

An address delivered at the University South Caroliniana Society's 86th Annual Meeting on Saturday, May 13, 2023

I've brought a few things to the archivist luncheon. I could have brought more, but I decided not to. *[Finney shows the audience five books.]* These will make a little more sense as we enter our conversation. I only brought five. Five's a good number.

Hello, everybody. Thank you so much for being here. Beryl, thank you so much — where's Beryl? — Beryl, thank you. We tried to do this last year, but my schedule was a bit packed.

I really, really feel very fortunate to be here today. Tom Johnson, it's great to see you again. Before I even moved here in 2013, Tom Johnson was sending me things: packets of material. "How did he get my address?" I wondered. I don't — I still don't know the answer to that. And Vernon Burton, it is an honor to meet you after studying so much of what you have written over the years. I am completely indebted to your scholarship for continuing to light a fire under me in so many ways, so thank you for being here as well.

Thank you, Caroliniana Library, grand archive and repository of South Carolina. I should tell you that the full name of my talk is — don't laugh — "The sensitive child has accidentally been locked inside the archives…. The only information we have is … she has a large supply of book snakes, several pencils, and no white gloves." If you don't know what book snakes are, ask an archivist sitting at your table. They might have one in their pocket. *[Laughter.]*

Grand archive and repository of the real South Carolina, thank you for existing and for reminding us every day, as we lift your remarkable, sometimes faded, torn, but perfect pages to the light of the world that we wish to live in, that it is you that holds the greatest possibility for us when humans sometimes let us down. And we should never leave your fat archival boxes closed too long or allow the acid-free folders to sleep too late into the day of our future. It is incumbent upon us to bend as close to you as we can, as often as we can, and pledge to keep our shared humanity close — everything you know about us — so that those who study your pages, and those, like myself, who wish to bring alive what is there in order to hold them out to other human beings, continue to believe and know that within you there are indeed paths to a future we have never seen before.

Such is the nature of valuable information — as of yet — unbanned.

You, dear archive, are the open tomb of our known and unknown, and we are such better soldiers in whatever arena we fight when we carry your letters, and memories, and sepia photographs onto that battlefield. You have always held the secrets of who we are, what we said and did. You have long been the great steppingstone to how we became who we became, who we now are: the good, the bad, the ugly of it all. And you remain to this day greatly and consistently — primarily, I think — ignored because of all the power you possess.

And, of course, the human beings themselves, working the room, are sometimes at fault for not always valuing what is valuable when it comes to the "all" of us and not just the "some" of us. But nevertheless, you are our repository, our keeping place, and I am your poet, working without white gloves, and with an ample supply of book snakes, wanting you to know how valuable I think you are, imperfect and perfect. Your 75,000 books and microfilm, your 1.3 million manuscripts. There are those, dear Caroliniana, who would prefer you succumb to the dust, prefer you snore your life away, pretend to be dead. Those are only the substitute cheerleaders still hanging around from 1860.

We others know the great, muscular secrets you hold about us could birth a new world. But this would, of course, require us, the living, to not be afraid of your truth and be better than we presently are about feeling uncomfortable.

Good afternoon, everyone. You have invited a poet to your business meeting. *[Laughter.]* I don't know if you thought this through or not. *[Laughter.]* But it's a little too late. My mother has made the trek with me, and this daughter has come to say that she greatly values, and also finds suspect, what we know to be treasures and repositories of human information: libraries, archives, museums, and other human collection sites. Which humans get to choose what's inside?

A great deal of my time as a human being and a poet has been, and is still spent, looking for or wondering about information. Actually, information is the genus that I seek, but knowledge would be its family, and know-how — not to be confused with know-it-all — would be the kingdom of that family. And I should also add that knowing is the greater order that guides me. I have thought quite seriously about where information is found, and housed, and kept, and stored, for decades. It is the root of what I do as a poet.

I'm not quite sure why I've been so nerdy about this for so long, but what I can tell you is this: I believe it has much to do with when and where I was born — I mean specifically, day, and time, and hour, and certainly to whom. And it also helps that I am a girl child, and my two powerful X chromosomes have always felt very much like nuclear Geiger counters.

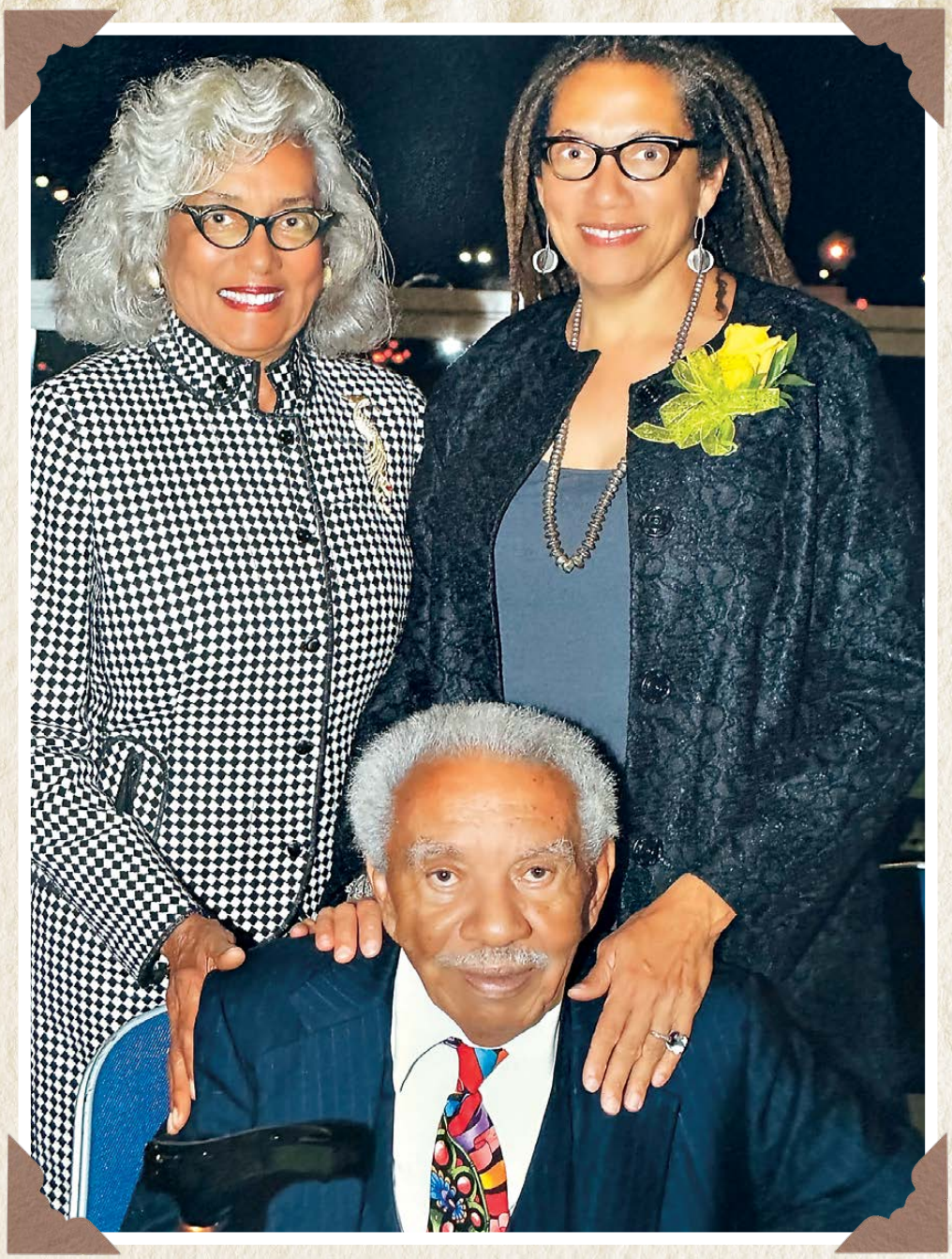
And as for the rest of my body and spirit I am curiously driven, quirky, eccentric, and therefore it also most certainly — has everything to do with my mom — calling me her sensitive child. Sorry, Mom, you wanted to ride shotgun today, so you have to sit there and hear it all. *[Laughter.]* My mother, who is entering her ninth decade *[Applause.]*, gave me compliments when I was a child growing up, but being a "sensitive child" was not one of them.

I didn't know it then, but at the time she was sending me a warning about how the world would treat a hypersensitive Black girl, and she did not want that life for me. She wanted me to toughen up a bit before leaving her sight for the larger world, and, though I hated being called a sensitive child when I was nine, I still knew somehow to protect my sensitive girl habitat and inklings, even though I had no idea back then how protecting these things, and finding others to help me protect them, would prove to be ultimately a superpower, both as a human being and a diligent poet, always hungry to know.

This sensitive child stuff has everything to do with leaning into, and dedicating a great deal of my time in my everyday little-girl life to, this desire to specifically and particularly know, all while I should have been hula hooping in the park with my friends. I have weirdly spent the last 50 years recording the knowledge about how I feel about so many things because, as my mother taught me, if I don't keep a record of it, who will?

I am the girl who writes it down, who kept notebooks in her back pockets, and who believed, at nine, Black people could disappear, just like the dinosaur. Early Black girl paleontologist leanings; the Conway girl, born a few inches from the Atlantic Ocean, building, slowly, over her many years, a knowing repository archive of words, of poetry.

The great American writer Willa Cather said this: "I think that the most basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of 15. That's the important period when one's not writing. Those years determine whether one's work will be poor and thin, or rich and fine," end quote. I discovered this quote by Cather when I was well into my forties, and I have not been able to, personally speaking, prove her thesis wrong. There is nothing that I write that does not contain my basic material. I think a lot about basic material. That's what I've come to talk about today — basic material.



Nikky Finney (right) poses with her mother, Frances Davenport Finney, and father, the late Ernest A. Finney Jr., a former chief justice of the S.C. Supreme Court, at the dedication of Finney's poem placed at USC's Desegregation Memorial, April 11, 2014.

Born in '57, Conway, South Carolina, I am a Sputnik baby. I believe in high flight, looking up, and travel by rocket. There's always something to discover in the garden sky of the Moon. My father and mother were both Black children who grew up on farms; therefore, geography is foundational. Motown music was founded by Berry Gordy in the year of my birth. There will always be The Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson, and Nina Simone in the balcony of my poetry. You might find it deftly labeled as sonic matter. The Frisbee was introduced in 1958, and therefore spinning, rotation, and levitation is always necessary before the last line arrives. Peace symbols began popping up during my adolescence. As a child, I noticed people streaming into American streets with signs and placards. "Freedom" is one of my "mascon" words (a NASA term). I am well aware that there are also people who have never been uncomfortable with their lives, who never stream into any American Street unless they are protected by privilege and a shiny new car.

Back in the beginning days, my mother never allowed us to watch much TV. "Grab a book," she would say — one of her mantras. Even then, I would feel the streets

Nikky Finney (center) and her mother, Frances Davenport Finney (left), chatted with Marjorie B. Hammock (right) and other annual meeting attendees before, during, and after the luncheon.

pounding with thousands of protesting feet wanting the world to be fulfilled with more justice. The John Birch Society was founded by the right-wing candy manufacturer Robert Welch shortly after my birth. The organization would grow to more than 60,000 members, and I would learn to keep them in focus with my side eyes while also learning how to diagram a sentence.

The Vietnam War began just before my birth and would not end until my graduation from high school. The sign "war is not healthy for children and other living things" would remain on my bedroom wall until I went to college. Americans would buy 100 million hula hoops during the year I dropped to Earth. One of the best lines I will ever write in my life will involve the image of a hula hoop. We can talk about that later. Can a hula hoop be archived? Of course — if the archivist has been educated to care enough about it.

In 1959, in the United States of America, Black people began to sit in at Greensboro lunch counters, and my father was recruited to a small Southern town as one of the new, young constitutional whiz kids. My mother kept a close eye on me at the kitchen table, licking Greenback stamps and cutting out stories of Black achievement from magazines.

In the 1960s, 48 percent of U.S. Blacks lived outside of the 11 states of the old Confederacy. This number is up from 30 percent from 1940. Kodachrome 2 color film was introduced. Kodachrome 2 is two times faster than the Kodachrome first introduced in 1936. I fell deeply in love with photography. James Baldwin writes *Nobody Knows My Name* in 1961. Medgar Evers is murdered entering the door of his home in Mississippi in 1962. Four Black girls are bombed in a Black church in Birmingham in '63. Every one of them looks like me. Nineteen other Black girls are injured. President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in 1963. This is the basic material of my young life. Martin Luther King utters these words: "I have a dream," at the Lincoln Memorial. The Beatles score their first big success with "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and it will never be a popular Black girl decision on my part, but I'll always prefer the sound of The Monkees. *[Laughter.]*

I keep Jackson 5 posters on my wall alongside the war poster, and also a gigantic headshot of Angela Y. Davis speaking into a microphone. One day Davis is placed on the FBI's most wanted list, and every Black girl that looks like her will suddenly be looked at differently. Cassius Marcellus Clay and his poetry will knock out Sonny Liston at the age of 22 in 1964. I will, without warning, fall in love with the word "pugilist," but still find boxing too Neanderthal to watch. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown will be published.

Toni Morrison, the magnificent Black woman thinker and writer, will publish *The Black Book* in 1974, a book of Black memorabilia, a book that might have been pieced together from various familial or academic or state information archives. As archivists, I hope you know this book. I have never seen anything like it. *The Black Book* stamps me at the age of 17. It alters my understanding about what is possible when someone calls themself a historian, a writer, a dreamer all in the same breath. I also realize my mother has been making archival books all along. All our family's memorabilia,

all our comings and goings and doings since the beginning of us, she has been putting together. She has a degree in early childhood education from an historical Black college, and she knows the importance of making books at home for her growing Black children in a country that, as Malcolm Gladwell put it, sees Black skin as an accelerant.

At 22, I find myself in Strand Book Store in New York City in the poetry aisle with American poet Lucille Clifton's book *Generations* opened and stretched across the palm of my hands. I read it three times before the store closes, staring at her family photographs right beside her family history — which is American history. Before this book I did not know a poet could pair poetry with photographs so intimately. This moment makes me think about my mother's humongous sewing scissors and how she keeps them in the holster of her hip. OK, OK, that's just hyperbole. But this is also the time that I fall in love with hyperbole. But I try to only use it when necessary.

When the newest *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines arrive at our house and after the children have all been tested on what is new in the larger Black diasporic world, Mama carefully cuts out article, after article, after article, after article on Black history and achievement, and gingerly, carefully places all of them down in a manila folder, labeled with her beautiful handwriting. And later, when I leave her protective daily eyes to go off into the world on my own, she will stuff those same articles down into hundreds of letters and send them off to me, to 12 different addresses, from California to Kentucky.

In each of her letters, I find, discover, and am reminded of our great scientists, our great artists, our great jurists who seem to mean nothing to the larger whiter world. I will ask her, many times, "Mama, why do you keep sending me all of this stuff?" And every time she will answer in the same tone of voice, "If I don't keep this for you, who will?" Marginalia: If those being noted are from South Carolina — Althea Gibson, James Brown, Dizzy Gillespie — there is always a special mother note on the back: "Don't settle. No excuse. You are not the first to do well in this world." *[Laughter.]*

I said this to you before: my mother has a degree in early childhood education from an historically Black college. But I have not said to you that my mother was raised by Black farmers in the Upstate of South Carolina. Many of her memories are peppered with the moment the Ku Klux Klan turned their flatbed onto the long driveway of their farm, the red dust rising, and her father, my grandfather, making them crouch like frogs in the attic as the Klan arrived and pounded upon both back and front doors wanting in — wanting this Black family who owned land in Klan country. This early American terrorism was the glue on every envelope.

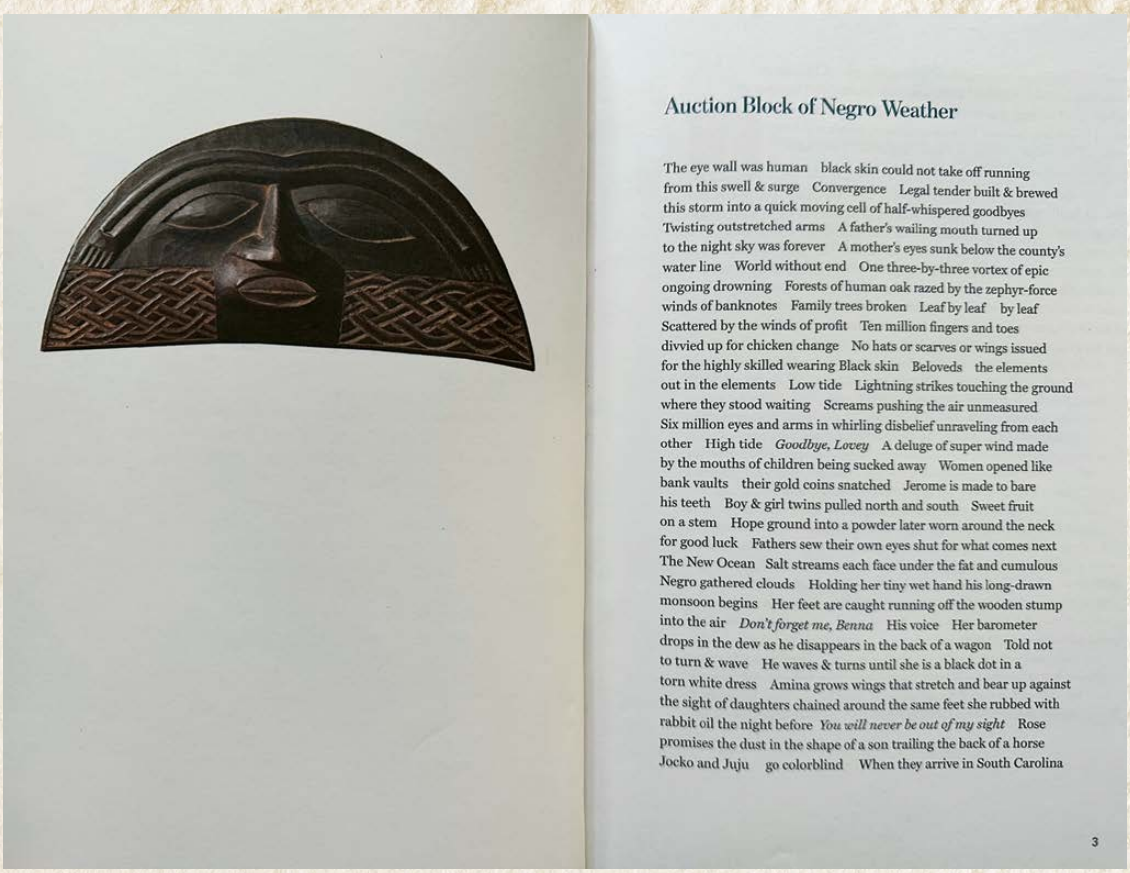
My mother knew America. My mother knew that America saw Black skin as that accelerant. She also knew the importance of saving and protecting the stories that the larger world seemed to want to ignore. She knew that repetition was holy, and therefore showed us the inventions of Black people until those inventions became our wallpaper, and then went the extra step to glue them down in beautiful homemade scrapbooks spilling with photos of the world we lived in and the worlds that had given us a path to our better lives. These torn photos of great grandmothers and grandfathers we never got to meet, eyes clear, hands double busted from farming the land, a mule in the background of the scene, a smile made of indigo and the dust of Carolina gold, a hat perched over a knot like a tiny bird ready to fly.

And I was and am her very sensitive only daughter, who began to make my own homemade books, mixing together everything given and past, and found. I had to grow into how to tell what had really happened, and not be afraid — as Beryl has already told you — to say the hard things and to also not to leave out the beautiful. This way of putting things together seemed to be my early North Star.

And then there is that one day in Seattle, a stranger in the audience raises his hand and says this crazy thing to me, and I accept it as a gift and write it down: "Painters in mid-19th-century Paris sometimes lived near slaughterhouses. They painted and did their work, made their own version of beauty, right inside the lulling sound of cattle about to die." And by the time he sat down I knew I could do what I wanted to do with words: mix the hard-to-say thing with the beautiful thing that must be said.

The books that sit before you on this table are five of approximately 175. Most are hardback, and all are numbered on their spine. These are books from a growing shelf of books that I have kept my entire life because my father called me his love child and my mother packed the pockets of my culottes and rain boots with Black ephemera. All 175 (and growing) are volumes of my personal archive. These books have ordered me since I was nine. This accumulation is what orders my knowing in this world, what I write out of and into, all of the minutia, every war, all the music, the art, the celebration.

There are two words found in two of these journal books. They are two words that also begin my last collection, *Love Child's Hotbed of Occasional Poetry*:



Auction Block of Negro Weather

The eye wall was human black skin could not take off running from this swell & surge Convergence Legal tender built & brewed this storm into a quick moving cell of half-whispered goodbyes Twisting outstretched arms A father's wailing mouth turned up to the night sky was forever A mother's eyes sunk below the county's water line World without end One three-by-three vortex of epic ongoing drowning Forests of human oak razed by the zephyr-force winds of banknotes Family trees broken Leaf by leaf by leaf Scattered by the winds of profit Ten million fingers and toes divvied up for chicken change No hats or scarves or wings issued for the highly skilled wearing Black skin Beloveds the elements out in the elements Low tide Lightning strikes touching the ground where they stood waiting Screams pushing the air unmeasured Six million eyes and arms in whirling disbelief unraveling from each other High tide *Goodbye, Lovey* A deluge of super wind made by the mouths of children being sucked away Women opened like bank vaults their gold coins snatched Jerome is made to bare his teeth Boy & girl twins pulled north and south Sweet fruit on a stem Hope ground into a powder later worn around the neck for good luck Fathers sew their own eyes shut for what comes next The New Ocean Salt streams each face under the fat and cumulous Negro gathered clouds Holding her tiny wet hand his long-drawn monsoon begins Her feet are caught running off the wooden stump into the air *Don't forget me, Benna* His voice Her barometer drops in the dew as he disappears in the back of a wagon Told not to turn & wave He waves & turns until she is a black dot in a torn white dress Amina grows wings that stretch and bear up against the sight of daughters chained around the same feet she rubbed with rabbit oil the night before *You will never be out of my sight* Rose promises the dust in the shape of a son trailing the back of a horse Jocko and Juju go colorblind When they arrive in South Carolina

3

"Auction Block of Negro Weather," as printed in Finney's book Love Child's Hotbed of Occasional Poetry

"minglement" and "hotbeds." This last book published in 2020 is a minglement, a mixture of photographs, letters, articles, poetry, things found, unforgettable things said to me on airplanes, things I never want to forget, things that help me get to the next level of my humanity. I'm going to read for you two things that came directly from two of these journal books. And then I hope — I hope there's some Q and A. Are we having Q and A today? OK. I love Q and A.

So, Wofford College contacted me many years ago. They were about to refurbish their Main (administration) Building. They wanted to send me some archival material on who had first built the structure. I love research assignments like this. I had my book snakes ready. I had my pencils sharpened. I accepted the challenge. I'm just going to read a portion of this poem that came out of that archival work. It's called, "The Thinking Men, on the Occasion of Wofford College Recognizing that the Builders of Old Main, 1856, Were Enslaved People with Dreams of Their Own":

More than blue fingers and endless backs. To teach us was against the law.
Our math, mind, and muscle could see beyond what they thought they had enslaved.

We knew more than we could say.

In the middle of a cow field every heart hammered purpose, nailed a learning floor, poured tower one and two, one hundred feet high,

arms and legs ballooned and ballet, sweltering in the endless daily march and task, holding okra soup close, waste beads and the old, old names back across the water: Afua. Safia. Fatu. Ihotu. Obafemi. Uzman.

We slid and nagged adze and auger, laid roof and wall, from east to west, all progress safety-pinned to weather, twentypennies, and architect's disposition.

We were thinking men. Our hands were living blackboards.

A true and readable account is what we wanted left behind. Toil and mission
of character planted in the soft stew of oak, dirt, rain, tar, and long leaf pulp.

From can-see to can't-see, in between the pegging and plugging of labor,
a man can sign his name to his grindstone quest with or without budget or permission.

With or without quill or lead a signature can still be minted in vermilion mud.
Who he is, the thing done, melded into his own cash and coin, as long as the walls

themselves stand tall. This was no simple field fence, some easy throw of dung,
sod and sop, meant to keep hog and mountain lion out. We raised this place

in the name of the new day coming, how we would one day be counted,
along with the day-to-day blight of life equally wormed out. We carved out

these doors and hallways for the long grasp and bright understanding that one day would arrive, realizing all the while that those who entered might not only

fish for answer, root and die for more than heads or tails, but also memorize
for the sweet curve and curl of the words themselves, even if

we could not join in the lifelong hunt for any of it ourselves.

In every arch and swirl of ruby brick there is a mix of Bantu and Gambian oil, fingernail, and spit. Tin cups of elder chokecherry blood run along 226 feet of cord.

In every whorl of mud a print of our day-to-day has been made great and permanent. Math, mind, and muscle ply deep into each and every dark seam.

The part of us they could see was tethered like a mule's back. The part they could not: our levitation into one whole sky of black and beating wing.

It took math and muscle, and all of this can leave a clear mark upon a world.

And then this last one. I was researching and went down a rabbit hole and found something that happened to Black people in 1859 called The Weeping Time. *[Finney whispering:]* I said, "What is that?"

On March 2nd and 3rd, 1859, over 400 African American enslaved men, and women, and children were sold on a racetrack in Savannah, Georgia, under two days of torrential rain. The sale was so painful, so excruciatingly painful that enslaved people and others, journalists, witnesses, remembered afterwards, that the skies opened, and "even God wept." The Weeping Time was the largest auction of enslaved people in U.S. history and was held so that slave owner Pierce Butler could pay off his gambling debts.

Butler, the gambling grandson of one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution, Senator Pierce Butler, inherited half of his grandfather's vast Georgia plantation. The family's wealth was made possible through the efforts of the huge number of enslaved people who worked the rice and cotton fields — for generations.

Over many of those generations, those enslaved on the Butler Island Plantation became like family to each other since the Butler family had not sold or separated their enslaved workers — hardly ever. The sale included Butler's "movable property," the 436 of the enslaved persons from the tightly knit Plantation community. The sale at the Savannah racetrack meant that parents, children, siblings, and friends, who had known each other for many years, were separated over the course of a few days and likely never saw each other again.

One of my jobs as an artist and a poet in this life is, on this occasion of Mother's Day weekend, thanking my own mother for everything she gave me, thanking all of the mothers in the room for everything you've done for us and others, but also remembering the mothers who are not here: the mothers who were separated from their children because of laws that existed in the day. I wrote this poem called "Auction Block of Negro Weather" for them:

The eye wall was human. Black skin could not take off running from this swell and surge convergence. Legal tender built and brewed this storm into a quick moving cell of half whispered goodbyes, twisting outstretched arms, a father's wailing mouth turned up to the night sky was forever. A mother's eyes sunk below the county's water line, world without end. One three X three vortex of epic ongoing drowning. Forests of human oak raised by the zephyr-force winds of banknotes. Family trees broken, leaf by leaf by leaf, scattered by the winds of profit. Ten million fingers and toes divvied up for chicken change. No hats or scarves or wings issued for the highly skilled wearing black skin. Beloveds, the elements out in the elements. Low tide. Lightning strikes, touching the ground where they stood waiting. Screams pushing the air unmeasured. Six million eyes and arms in whirling disbelief, unraveling from each other. High tide. "Goodbye, Lovey." A deluge of super-wind made by the mouths of children being sucked away from their mothers. Women opened like bank vaults; their gold coins snatched. Jerome is made to bear his teeth. Boy and girl twins spoke north and south. Sweet fruit on a stem. Hope ground into a powder, later worn around the neck for good luck. Fathers sew their own eyes

Two prized possessions: a gifted book snake is draped over a stack of Finney's personal journals, the contents of which have informed her many writings.

shut for what comes next: the new ocean. Salt streams each face under the hat and under the fat and cumulus negro gathered clouds. Holding her tiny wet hand, his long-drawn monsoon begins. Her feet are caught running off the wooden stump into the air. "Don't forget me, Benna." His voice, her barometer, drops in the dew as he disappears in the back of a wagon. Told not to turn and wave, he waves and turns until she is a black dot in a torn white dress. Amina grows wings that stretch and bear up against the sight of daughters chained around the same feet she rubbed with rabbit oil the night before. "You will never be out of my sight," Rose promises the dust and the shape of a son trailing the back of a horse. Jocko and Juju go colorblind when they arrive in South Carolina, the rows of cotton are long squalls of blue and green. A handsome woman stands in the middle of hurricane force winds. Her 10-year-old daughter is led away by a man with a whip whose zipper keeps flying open. The weather vanes of their sweet tobacco breath still hover in every public square of every city of this Republic. "I was here," they remind us, if we dare lift our eyes to look. The promise of their stolen lives crumbled in between the joists and the starlight of the jet stream, a handsome people who arrived with trembling broken hearts, punctured lungs, liver spots. A lovesome lot who arrived with belly buttons and blackberry moles, came slew footed and left-handed, cried easily, or not at all. A red-blooded tribe who ran away and ran back for others, who fought and molded a nation out of infested swamps, impassable timberland, and eyewall after eyewall of hate. It was cataclysmic. Water was everywhere. Their easy-on-the-eyes hearts pushed back, but the conquerors kept coming.

That is what I make out of all that you do. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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Post-talk Q&A with Nikky Finney

[Beryl Dakers] Is there anybody who has a question for Nikky Finney?

[Audience Member] I don't have a question. I have an affirmation. I was lucky enough to, you know, be speaking to your mother, and she talked about Newberry, and that's where my family's from. And you, you used the phrase "working from can-see to can't-see."

[Finney] Yes.

[Audience Member] And my granddaddy said that all the time. You'd work from can-see to can't-see. And when you say that in your poem, it just really took me back.

[Finney] And you know, the thing about that phrase is, I heard it from folks from the Lowcountry, I didn't hear it Upstate. But that tells you the sign of movement that was happening between Black people, and Black culture, and Black language, and Black words. It didn't just stretch to the Upstate, it also stretched far and wide. So, that language was a part of — there might have been a different dialect or something — but that came straight to me from Lowcountry Carolina.

[Audience Member] Took me back to home, to nine years old.

[Finney] Yes, yes. I mean, that's a poem to me, you know, like, six o'clock to six o'clock is boring. Can-see to can't-see? Get it! Yes, ma'am!

[Second Audience Member] I heard it from my grandmother, from Westport, Connecticut, who had moved from the South.

[Finney] Yes, in the migration.

[Second Audience Member] I heard that, also.

[Finney] Yes, the migration: we took our words with us. We took our phrases, and our jokes, and our songs, and all of that, culturally, with us. They might change over time, but they would essentially stay the same.

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[Third Audience Member] I wonder if you could just take a moment to elaborate on your piece in the 1619 Project: "Daughters of Azimuth." I read it, and I read it, and I always feel like I need to read it again.

[Finney] I have gotten so many questions about that poem. There were about 30 writers who were asked to submit some work for Nikole Hannah-Jones' 1619 project. And I was so honored to be asked to be in that collection. And so, as a woman who loves history and research, I'm also always thinking about what's *not* in the archives. What might be too private and culturally personal.

I believe with all my heart that there were groups and circles of Black women who fought against being enslaved in a multitude of different ways. One of those ways was to try and prevent the pregnancy that came from being raped by white male enslavers. This is a documented act of resistance and is found in the poem. And the other way I was thinking about in this particular poem, for these particular women, was to focus on them transitioning their enslaved bodies into another realm. So I have them meditating on a certain part of the sky. The azimuth is the direction of a celestial object from the position of the observer. I wanted to give these women — these observers — the visual power over where they were. They gather to look away from being enslaved. Enslaved women are always presented as powerless. The system ravaged and violated and killed them. I also believe they never stopped fighting back. I believe they said, "Let me throw my eyes to some area of the sky and meditate on flight, or home, or the old, old sound of my (African) mother's voice." I will never believe that African women did less than this.

[Third Audience Member] Thank you.

[Finney] Yes. People write me and they say, "I never heard of this before. How did they do this? How could they have found botanicals that actually prevented pregnancy, and that kind of thing, and what if somebody found it?" You know, those kinds of things. And I think we think narrowly about the human condition when enslaved. And I think that one of the things that I want to do as an artist is break those narrow walls down, push those walls back and tell another possible truth that perhaps is not in the archive, something that I know in my heart is absolutely real.

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[Forth Audience Member] Speaking of spoken truth, your stuff is so emotional, and it just takes the hearer, the listener through these waves of envisioning and bringing to life the worst that you speak. And having that within you, I wonder how you cope today, when people are banning books, people are denying history, people are making up truth.

[Finney] No. not truth. You can make up a lie. But you can't make up truth.

[Laughter.]

[Forth Audience Member] People are making up truth because you have — right, "truth" — because you have a whole bunch of people out there believing and acting on made-up truth.

[Finney] Absolutely.

[Forth Audience Member] How do you deal with it?

[Finney] So, this is such a great question. And I tell my students this all the time because I tell it to myself. Because Toni Morrison told me, "If you spend all your time reacting to foolishness and lies, you will not spend your time doing what you should be doing. You will create nothing of your own. You will write no 'Auction Block of Negro Weather.'"

They do what they do; you can't silence that. But you can also look away — and create what a young person needs to anchor, something fierce and proud to swallow, to understand, and run down the road with. If you spend all your time reacting to those liars, you will never make anything that will last. All you are doing is living in a reactionary mode. If you look at TV a lot, if you get on social media a lot — which I don't — you will remain in that reactionary space. If you step back and think about what truths are being avoided and why — if

Finney signed books and greeted attendees after her talk.

you go deep into what moves you as a human being and why — then you might have some other things you might want to do with your headspace and your heart space.

The Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, were both about creating new worlds, new literature, new music. You know? So as long as the gaze, g-a-z-e, is on Black and Brown people reacting to injustice and discrimination and and and … then we will never mine the quiet, the solitude, and the understanding of who we are and how necessary it is to create something whole and healthy and new. *[Applause.]*

Your question is very important, and to me it's very simple, but it also means we've got to stop looking over there and look where we really are, and look inside who we are. Howard Thurman said, in order to be on the right human path we must "listen to the sound of the genuine." I have followed that truth for many years. You've got to find what your genuine is. And if you can find where your genuine lives, then you can create something that we need in this room and that we also need outside this room.

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[Fifth Audience Member] Speaking of creating things, can you take just a minute to talk about the newly created Cultural Arts Center, in your father's honor?

[Finney] So, somehow, somebody finagled this out of me, they got me out of my hermit status to be the director of something that I feel is bigger than me and also bigger than any one person. 1510 Laurens Street is the Ernest A. Finney, Jr. Cultural Arts Center, and we are just starting, and we are bubbling with so many people knocking on the door. So many Black artists and artists of color are coming out of the woodwork to introduce themselves to each other. We believe a cultural arts center is a priceless human savings bank. We believe that for far too long the arts has been centered in one community and not all communities. We want to be an incubating space for the visual arts, the literary arts, the culinary arts, all the human arts.

We're having an artist talk in a couple of weeks, where we're just going to get in the room and say, "What does it feel like to be an artist of color? A Black artist in South Carolina?" because I was told I couldn't become an artist here. So I'm wondering what happens now, so many generations later. We are pouring our foundation, just starting, and we have a 1940s airplane hangar, six thousand square feet, that I call the Longhouse, because I like the history and concept of a longhouse. It's a Native American concept. It's also Celtic. It has also been embraced by other cultures. And so even though we are focused on Black cultural arts, everybody's invited inside, under this one roof, to talk about our particulars, right, but also work towards the same human thing. The Longhouse imagery is very important to me in this endeavor. We've been doing this for about a year. The University of South Carolina has been kind enough and, maybe, I hope, forward-thinking enough to allow me time away from teaching for two years to start this endeavor. And I'm due back in January, so I've got a lot to do, still. But we have a Facebook page, we have a sign-up area for what we're doing and what we're dreaming of doing. Would love for you to be a part of it. I think it's something my father would be very proud of.

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[Sixth Audience Member] What do you plan to do with your 175 books?

[Finney] People will put you on the spot, won't they? *[Laughter.]* If you let them, they will.

I'm getting to the place, the age, where I need to think about what I'm going to do with all of them. So many times, when I travel to a university those organizers put on my itinerary, "Oh, we want you to come to our archive!" About three weeks ago I went to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and spent several hours in the Gwendolyn Brooks Archive, and kind of lost my mind, which is where the wonderful book snakes' image in the title came from. They gave me a gift of one, and I've just been toting it all around the house. Do you know, does everybody know, what a book snake is?

Oh, wow. Well, so, a book snake is yay long *[Finney demonstrates with her hands]*, maybe 12, 14 inches. Somebody else can describe this better. But it's made of lead, and it has a cotton sheath on it — so if I go wrong, somebody tell me — and when you're working with books that you don't want to touch, and you want to lay it open to the public or to the archivist, you put this heavy, weighted thing on the page, and it just lays across the page without harming the page or getting in your way. Is that correct, archivists in the room?

[Graham Duncan] Yeah, you got it!

[Finney] Okay. good. So — I became incredibly fascinated with them, and they gave me one, and I thought that the people at TSA were going to grab it when I tried to get on the plane because it was lead, right? But I got through. *[Laughter.]*

I like archival things. Anything in the family of paper. I like boxes, unfortunately, and I always write with a pencil, so I don't have any problem going in the archive. But I've got to tell you this. So — I'm there in the Urbana-Champaign archive. They're trying to convince me to — well, in all honesty, they've heard of my 175 books — and they pull out Gwendolyn Brooks' papers to show me how serious they are. So — there's this file, and there's only one yellow Kleenex tissue in a folder. By itself, just the tissue. Clean. Never used. But it has its own folder! And I was like, "You kept this?" They're like, "Oh, yes." The side of the folder read, "Yellow Kleenex, 1944." You've got to love an archivist! *[Laughter.]*

Oh, can I tell one more story?

[Dakers] You can tell one more story.

[Finney] This I've got to tell you. If you live long enough, things come to you in a circle — so, here are these brown journal books that I have been using since 1989. This is the kind of journal book that I've been writing in for the last 30, 40 years. Okay.

So, my dear sweet, amazing father passes away in 2017 and a young woman that we know, my family knows her family, etc., comes to my door one day with a box — and she says, "My family has something to return to you." I open the box: There are three books that externally look exactly like my journal books that I have been using since 1989. I'm puzzled. I wonder did I drop some of my journals somewhere?

My father gave his law school notebooks, filled with his beautiful handwriting, to her father because he too was a young Black man who wanted to go to law school. My father wanted to help him. He wanted to inspire him, so he gave her father his notebooks after he was finished with them — as possible inspiration. All the notes he took on the family law, on torts, on the Constitution, while he attended law school at South Carolina State University were being held before me in covers that I knew very personally. She told me her father never took the leap to attend law school, but he kept these three notebooks on the top of his desk until he died.

I did not know until this moment that these hardbound books were made primarily for young law students, not pencil-loving poets. I did not know they have been making these books since the 1940s. These are law journals. You can buy them, or you could up until a few years ago, from the bookstore at most universities. I began buying mine when I arrived at the University of Kentucky. My father purchased the three books that she gave me when he enrolled at S.C. State. He kept his law school notes in 1953 in the same kind of book that I would find in the University of Kentucky bookstore in 1989! The same size, the same number of pages. My father saw me bring this same book home for 20, 30 years. He never said a word! *[Laughter.]*

I'm so mad at him! *[Laughter.]*

Okay, that's my final story from the archives. *[Laughter.]*

[Dakers] And there you have it from the love child. *[Laughter.]*

[Applause.]

[Dakers] Nikky, I cannot thank you enough for being with us today, for sharing, and for acknowledging that you are a part of the Society family — as are those of you who are with us today. Thank you so much for your presence. I hope that you will be motivated to become a very active part of our family, and that you'll continue to follow us in all you do. Have a wonderful Mother's Day. Goodbye.

[Applause.]

Watch Finney's talk on YouTube on the Society's channel: https://www.youtube.com/@USCarolinianaSociety.

University South Caroliniana Society

Staff and faculty of the South Caroliniana Library from left to right: Nicole Molyneux, Debbie Bloom, Taryn Cooksey, Abby Cole, Todd Hoppock, Beth Bilderback, Brian Cuthrell, Rob Smith, Ron Bridwell, Craig Keeney, Rose Thomas, Zella Hilton, and Graham Duncan.

University South Caroliniana Society

Two of approximately 75 attendees, mother Betty Price (right) and daughter Carmen Jordan (left), pause to smile for the camera.

Annual meeting

The 86th annual meeting of the University South Caroliniana Society was held on May 13, 2023. About 75 members gathered in the Campus Room of the Capstone Conference Center.

Following the invocation by Dr. Bobby Donaldson, associate professor of history and the university's first James E. and Emily E. Clyburn Endowed Chair of Public Service and Civic Engagement, remarks were given by David Banush, dean of University Libraries; Beth Bilderback, interim director of South Caroliniana Library; and Henry Fulmer, Society secretary-treasurer.

The Society's president, Beryl M. Dakers, then provided business updates, thanked outgoing officers and councilors, and affirmed new serving members. (See Dakers' letter, pg. 34, for more details.) Dakers then gave a warm introduction for renowned poet and Carolina Distinguished Professor Nikky Finney, an S.C. native and the university's John H. Bennett Jr. Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Literature.

Finney delivered a moving keynote address she playfully titled "The sensitive child has accidentally been locked inside the archives." Ever the poet, Finney entertained, enlightened, and inspired. Attendees were then treated to a Q&A with Finney as well.

The text of Dakers' introduction, Finney's talk, and the resulting Q&A are all featured in this edition of *Caroliniana Columns*.

University South Caroliniana Society

Bill Schmidt (left) talks to Dr. Orville Burton at the meeting.

University South Caroliniana Society

President Beryl Dakers introduces keynote speaker Nikky Finney.

University South Caroliniana Society

New Executive Council member Dr. Robert Greene II makes the rounds after picking up some light reading: the most recent copies of *Columns* and the annual report.

University South Caroliniana Society

Secretary-Treasurer Henry Fulmer delivers his remarks at the annual meeting.

Grand Reopening

(Left to right) University President Michael Amiridis, University Libraries Dean David Banush, Cocky, Stamps Scholar and honors student Anusha Ghosh, University Archivist Elizabeth West, and USC Board of Trustees Chair Thad Westbrook take part in the ribbon-cutting.

University of South Carolina President Michael Amiridis

Jim Barrow (center) with his niece, Heath Greene; daughter, Jennifer; wife, Jean; and granddaughter, Callie

(Left to right) Nathan Saunders, Rob Smith, Nick Doyle, Graham Duncan, Jake Stewart, Cocky, Todd Hoppock, Abby Cole, Showanda Mosley, David Banush, Elizabeth West, Craig Keeney, Zella Hilton, Brian Cuthrell, and Beth Bilderback

Ceremony

Photos courtesy of Kim Truett

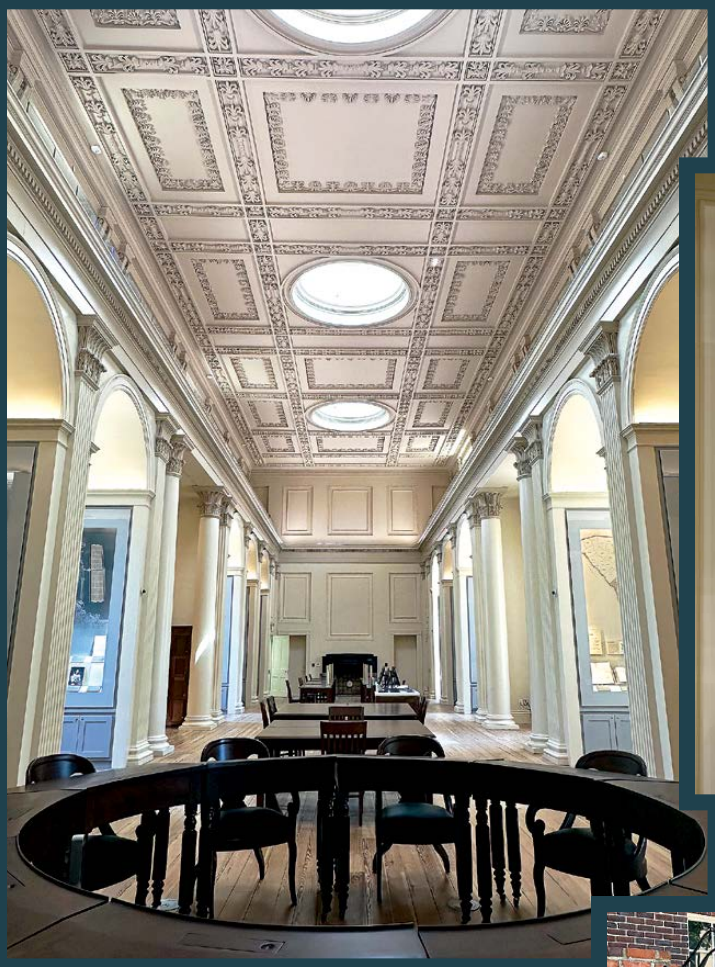
To much fanfare, and after extensive renovations, the South Caroliniana Library's grand reopening took place on Oct. 5, 2023. A quick tour of the renovated space makes one thing clear: after four years and $10 million in renovations, the library is ready for the next 200 years of serving the university and the state.

A crowd of about 200 joined staff members and invited guests on the historic Horseshoe, directly in front of the library, on Oct. 5 for remarks, the ribbon-cutting, and the official reopening of the library. The first freestanding public college library in the nation when it opened in 1840, Caroliniana's renovations represent the beautiful melding of a classic structure with modern technology and archival approaches.

If you haven't seen it in person yet, we hope you'll be able to visit soon to see this remarkable space for yourself. In the meantime, please enjoy these photos from the reopening.

Photos courtesy of Kristine Hontz

South Caroliniana Library

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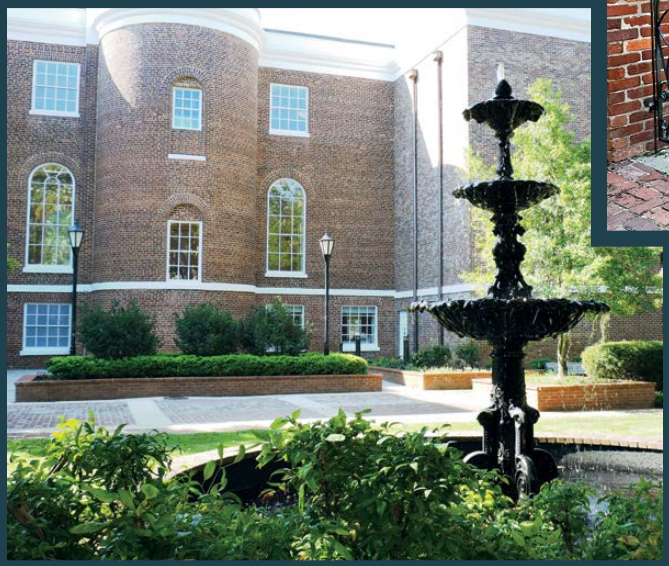
LIBRARY



Eliana Chavkin

ELLISON DURANT SMITH RESEARCH AWARD

The Ellison Durant Smith Research Award provides financial support to undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate scholars to conduct research on politics, government, and society during the twentieth century, with an emphasis on South Carolina history, at the South Caroliniana Library during the calendar year for which it is awarded.

Civil War and World War I memorial in St. Matthews, South Carolina

My research focuses on American commemoration of the First World War. Funding from the Ellison Durant Smith Research Award made it possible for me to visit the South Caroliniana Library to study the papers of local chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in South Carolina, which will form part of a dissertation chapter on the unexpected forms of commemoration taken in the South. Special thanks to Todd Hoppock for his thorough and generous assistance!

Outside the Calhoun County Courthouse in St. Matthews, South Carolina, there sits a small war memorial that is dedicated to the memory of soldiers from two wars: the Civil War and World War I. Dedicated on November 10, 1920, the memorial links the soldiers who fought for the United States in World War I with their grandparents who fought against the United States in the Civil War. It is the only memorial of its kind in the state.

Following the First World War, it was not uncommon for towns to build memorials that looped World War veterans in with previous veterans: frequently those who had fought in the Spanish-American War or the Civil War, but sometimes all the way back to the Revolutionary War for those states that had participated. What is surprising about the St. Matthews memorial is that it is unique in South Carolina and, indeed, one of only a handful throughout the South that commemorate the Confederacy and the World War together. Shouldn't there be more?

THE MONUMENT BUILDERS

The St. Matthews memorial shares with other dual Confederate-World War memorials one key characteristic: it was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). At the time of the monument's dedication, the UDC was at the peak of its influence. Most famous for constructing Confederate memorials across the South, they were also carefully steering Southern history in their preferred direction through textbook censorship, historical essay competitions, and legislative advocacy. Shortly after the war, however, membership began to decline. This decline is linked directly to their wartime efforts.

The UDC rode the crest of the World War to national prominence with a unique double argument: that as Southerners they were the true defenders of the Constitution during the Civil War and thus the truest of all Americans, and that as daughters of the postwar South, they were the only Americans who could truly understand what it meant to aid war-torn countries in this new conflict. From this vantage point, the UDC seized on the Great War as a way to make Confederate history relevant to a new generation of Southerners and to the descendants of Confederates nationwide. Immediately after the war's outbreak, UDC President Cordelia Powell Odenheimer sent a telegram to Woodrow Wilson, the first Southerner in the White House since the outbreak of the Civil War. With his warm response in hand, they set to aiding the new war effort. Their plans to harness the war's narrative took a dizzying number of forms, both during the war and after.

FIGHTING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

During wartime, South Carolina UDC chapters took the radical step of suspending all monument construction, to better focus on fundraising for the war efforts. With their newly available funds and growing membership, the UDC raised money to name hospital beds in France after Confederate war heroes and packed millions of bandages and other supplies to be shipped overseas.

As soldiers shipped in from all over the country to the newly established Fort Jackson, the UDC took the lead on welcoming them and bringing them to the Confederate Relic Room in the South Carolina State House to showcase their version of Southern history. The UDC carefully documented the names and units of every soldier serving in the American Expeditionary Forces who had Confederate ancestry, even hosting a competition for which state could find the most.

After the war had ended, the UDC continued their efforts to marshal the war for their own purposes. They established a scholarship fund that would send veterans with Confederate ancestry to college, helping sponsor a new generation's future on the contingency that they remain entrenched in the past. Across the state, the UDC helped fund new memorials to World War veterans and, as at St. Matthews, even occasionally took the lead on building memorials that would honor both Confederate and World War veterans together. They also established a special Military Cross to honor those soldiers with Confederate ancestry who had served, which they awarded on days significant to Confederate history: Jefferson Davis' birthday, Confederate Memorial Day, and so on.

The UDC, in other words, did everything they could to mobilize the current war to fight a previous one. By submitting so wholeheartedly to the war effort, they sought to highlight Southern patriotism in a way that centered Confederate narratives and showed Southerners to be the truest of all Americans. Yet, despite this thorough and impressive setup, this narrative is almost entirely absent not only from South Carolina's commemoration of the war but from all Southern states. What happened?

THE PRICE OF VICTORY

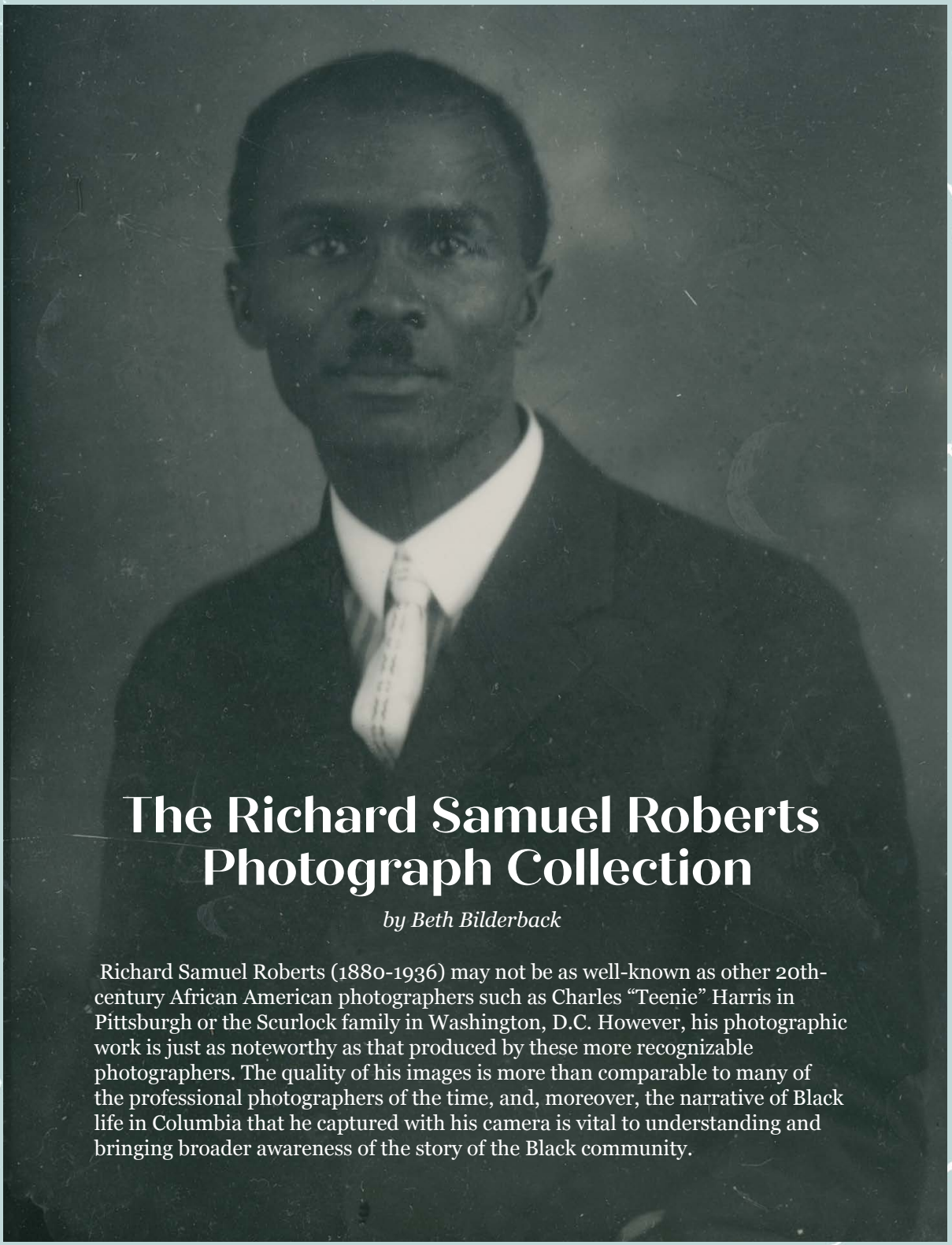
Commemorating the First World War was not a small affair in South Carolina. From Charleston's Ashley River Bridge and Columbia's World War Memorial Building to the small statues and boulders that dot many town centers, South Carolinians were very clearly committed to remembering the role they played in fighting the War to End All Wars. These memorials preserved the mores of the social and white elite under Jim Crow: customarily, memorials were segregated, or Black soldiers were left off entirely.

World War veterans, however, would not link themselves with their Confederate ancestors. In failing to anticipate this, the UDC floundered for the first time in its organizational history.

In fact, despite their best efforts to highlight their successful contributions to the war effort, UDC records themselves indicate how often their efforts to link the two conflicts went ignored by soldiers. In 1918, officers at Fort Jackson had to write an apology to the Girls of the 60s (a UDC-adjacent group of women who had been children at the time of the Civil War) because soldiers were not showing up to the events that they coordinated. "Why He Won't Talk," ran one postwar essay in the M.C. Butler/Columbia, S.C., Chapter, explaining to UDC members that World War veterans were not always keen to share their experiences of trauma in order to further UDC goals. The American Legion held their own ceremonies on Armistice Day, which left UDC celebrations barren of soldiers. World War veterans, it seemed, did not need the same services that the UDC had provided their fathers and grandfathers because these new veterans had won their war.

The UDC never again exercised quite as much influence as they had during and before World War I. Previously, historians have argued that the primary reason for the UDC's waning influence was that they had fulfilled their basic goals: after all, by 1918, most Southern towns had a Confederate memorial, legislation had been passed to teach students the "true" history of the Confederacy, and Lost Cause ideology had been enshrined in the American mind. But this interpretation misses another possible answer, one buoyed by all their wartime efforts and anchored in the monuments themselves. These documents and monuments suggest that the UDC attempted to pivot in a new direction by appealing to a younger generation to take up the mantle of Confederate history on the UDC's terms. In that, however, they failed.

— Eliana Chavkin is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.



The Richard Samuel Roberts Photograph Collection

by Beth Bilderback

Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) may not be as well-known as other 20th-century African American photographers such as Charles "Teenie" Harris in Pittsburgh or the Scurlock family in Washington, D.C. However, his photographic work is just as noteworthy as that produced by these more recognizable photographers. The quality of his images is more than comparable to many of the professional photographers of the time, and, moreover, the narrative of Black life in Columbia that he captured with his camera is vital to understanding and bringing broader awareness of the story of the Black community.

This page: Roberts' self-portrait

Example of the contact sheets printed by Phillip Dunn, with notes on reverse showing identifications made by community members.

Roberts relocated his family from Florida to Columbia in 1920. His wife, Wilhelmina Pearl Selena Williams, was having health problems, so they chose to move to Columbia, her hometown. They bought a home on Wayne Street in the Arsenal Hill neighborhood, and Roberts worked as a night custodian at the nearby post office. In 1922 he rented space on Washington Street in the Black Business District and opened a photography studio, while continuing his job at the post office. Roberts employed assistants in the studio, and Wilhelmina provided clothing and dress suggestions to sitters, also taking the pictures when necessary. Their older sons, Gerald and Beverly, also assisted when Roberts took his equipment out of the studio on jobs around South Carolina. With Roberts' death in 1936, the studio closed.

As a self-taught photographer, Roberts learned the art by reading and by doing, creating high-quality photographs. His lens caught an individual's spirit and dignity with sharp, well-posed yet seemingly natural sittings. Roberts also had a creative mind and developed procedures, techniques and equipment for his studio. He used draperies and reflecting screens to enhance lighting. His mechanical talents were used to design a hooded easel-like frame for retouching negatives and a large artificial lighting cabinet mounted on rollers to improve the poor lighting in the studio. He also designed a frame for the 5"x7" plate holder, which would expose half of the plate per shot, giving a 3-1/2"x5" inch format perfect for making photographic postcards, which were popular at the time.

Although there were African American photographers in the city before Roberts, when he arrived in Columbia and opened his business in 1922, it was the city's only Black-owned photography studio. Over the next 14 years, he produced some of the clearest documentation of Columbia's African American community in the early decades of the 20th century. Portraits of carpenters, chefs, doormen, taxi drivers, teachers, preachers, doctors, midwives, lawyers, morticians, dentists, activists, and housewives and their children all appear in the collection. While composed chiefly of studio portraits, the collection also contains homes, businesses, schools, colleges, churches, clubs and other gatherings, athletic teams, wedding portraits, casket portraits and funerals, graduation portraits, street scenes, and visiting entertainers.

His photographs also appeared in the *Palmetto Leader*, an African American newspaper published in Columbia. After Roberts purchased an automobile in 1924, he expanded his business statewide. In 1925, for example, he went to Orangeburg to take photographs for the yearbook of what is now South Carolina State University.

While the subjects of Roberts' photographs often reflect the "dreams deferred" in a segregated society, he also captured defiance and stubborn determination and the prosperity and elegance of members of the Black middle and working classes. Roberts' subjects represent a wide range of ages and economic situations. He photographed the city's Black laboring class with the

Photos by Roberts of several local children posing outside

same level of dignity and respect as he did Black upper- and middle-class subjects. All of this is perhaps best encapsulated in an interesting sitting that produced photographs of a woman wearing the uniform of a housemaid in one image and then her own dress and pearls in another.

Tom Johnson, then assistant director and field archivist of South Caroliniana Library, began his and the library's association with the Roberts family in the 1970s. He conducted oral histories with the Roberts children. Few records from the studio survived, so most information identifying the people in Roberts' photographs had been lost. Johnson worked with the Roberts family members and other members of the community to identify people in the photographs.

Johnson met with many individuals and groups to try to learn more about the people and places Roberts photographed. Phillip Dunn, an art professor at the University of South Carolina, was permitted to make contact prints and exhibit-quality prints. The family worked with Johnson and Dunn to produce the book *A True Likeness: The Black South of Richard Samuel Roberts, 1920-1936* and an exhibit of Roberts' work at the Columbia Museum of Art in 1986. A new edition of the book was published in 2019. The 350 images in the book are among the best, but they are only a tenth of the total number of images in the collection.

The South Caroliniana Library has plans to bring the whole of the Roberts collection to the world stage. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic gripped society, the Roberts grandchildren and great-grandchildren completed a gift-purchase arrangement with University Libraries. The University South Caroliniana Society provided monetary support to assist with the purchase of the 3,500 glass plate negatives.

Shortly after completing the agreement, the library began to apply for grant support to digitize the glass plate negatives, create a website, conduct research on the collection and create a small traveling exhibit to take to community gatherings to promote the collection. Although those efforts were not successful, the library is now working with the university's Center for Civil Rights History and Research, recipient of a significant grant from the National Parks Service that will enable digitization and online access of the collection. Plans for additional collaboration between the library and the center for further research and outreach efforts are being discussed, and an exhibit featuring the collection will likely be presented in the South Caroliniana Library in the future.

The library is very appreciative of the trust the Roberts family has in its commitment to preserving their family legacy and promoting the significant visual record created by Richard Samuel Roberts.

— Beth Bilderback is the visual materials archivist at South Caroliniana Library. She also has served as interim director since January 2022.

Members of a local chapter of the Phillis Wheatley Club pose for Roberts

A portrait of Vernell Simons by Roberts

Photo from the Marion Birnie Wilkinson Home for Girls in Cayce, South Carolina

Booker T. Washington High School football team, 1934

M. HAYES MIZELL: IN MEMORIAM

by Craig M. Keeney

On Sept. 26, 2022, the South Caroliniana Library lost a dear friend, supporter and longtime donor with the passing of M. Hayes Mizell. A student of history, Hayes first began donating his papers to the Caroliniana in the 1970s. He recently served as an officer for the University South Caroliniana Society.

Throughout his life, Hayes made "good trouble" in the spirit of United States Representative John Lewis. In 1961, while a graduate student at the University of South Carolina, Hayes joined a sit-in at a Columbia Woolworth's led by students at Benedict College. In 1963, he helped organize a student group in support of the racial integration of USC. The following year he accepted a position with the Southern Student Human Relations Project, an activist group headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1969, as director of the South Carolina Community Relations Program, Hayes and other activists staged a sit-in in the office of United States Attorney General John Mitchell to protest the Nixon administration's flagging support for enforcing integration laws.

Starting in the 1970s, Hayes addressed a variety of civil rights-related issues in the realm of public education. As a member of the Richland School District One Board of School Commissioners, Hayes sought to facilitate dialogue, inform students of their rights and pressure school administrators to comply with federal laws. He championed alternative disciplinary strategies and investigated issues of rezoning, school funding, and testing. His advocacy for civil and student rights earned him critics, but Hayes held his ground. As John Edgerton and Jack Bass noted, "He [Mizell] worked at getting his facts right, he presented them forcefully, he understood the intricacies of the federal role in desegregation, he was consistent in his attack, he had the patience to try again when he lost, and he usually kept his cool." This winning combination of leadership skills brought Hayes respect and recognition. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter appointed Hayes to chair the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children. In 1984, he became coordinator of the South Carolina State Employment Initiatives for Youth Demonstration Project, which sought to develop training programs for youths at risk of quitting school.

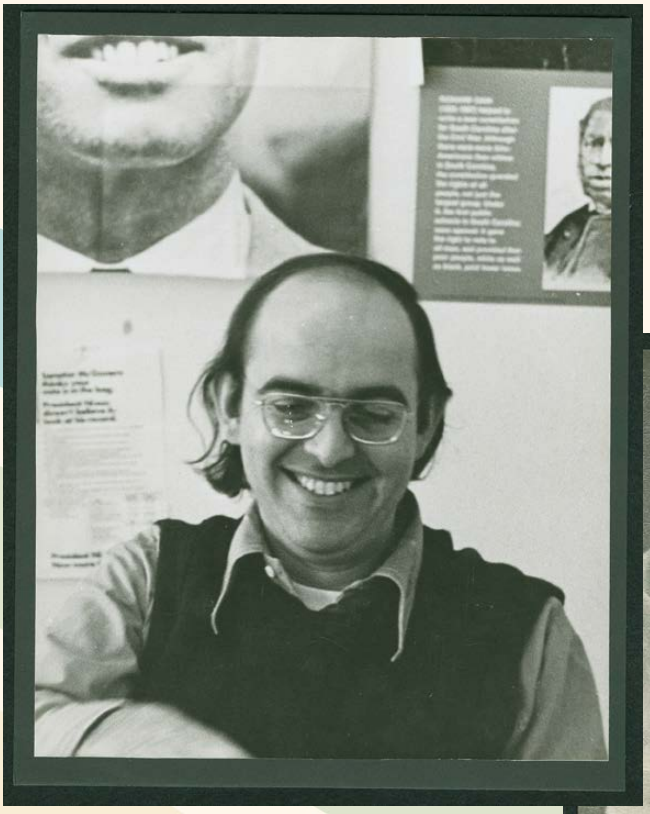
In 1987, Hayes Mizell joined the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to direct the Program for Disadvantaged Youth (later known as the Program for Student Achievement). Under his leadership, the program collaborated with public school systems in Baltimore, Maryland; Louisville, Kentucky; and Oakland, California, among others, to promote middle school curricular reform. In 2002, the Clark Foundation published a collection of Hayes' speeches titled *Shooting for the Sun: The Message of Middle School Reform* (available online: https://www.emcf.org/fileadmin/media/PDFs/history/sap_shootingforthesun.pdf). He retired from the Clark Foundation in 2003.

In 2004, Hayes participated in a march for equitable funding for South Carolina public schools, carrying a sign with the message, "Raise my taxes to provide high quality K-12 public education." When a commentator later asked if he was serious, Hayes responded with characteristic adamancy: "As a matter of fact, I meant what the sign said.... We cannot create a better future for our children and our state unless educators and citizens alike are willing to trod the hard and narrow way." Hayes could be cautious about his accomplishments, once even commenting on his archive, "I just want there to be a record in case my children or anyone else ever has any interest in who I was or what I did." The truth is the world has yet to catch up on many of the causes Hayes embraced, his commitment to equality not the least among them. Civil rights leader and Columbia native Modjeska Monteith Simkins described Hayes best, remarking, "He's all wool and a yard wide."

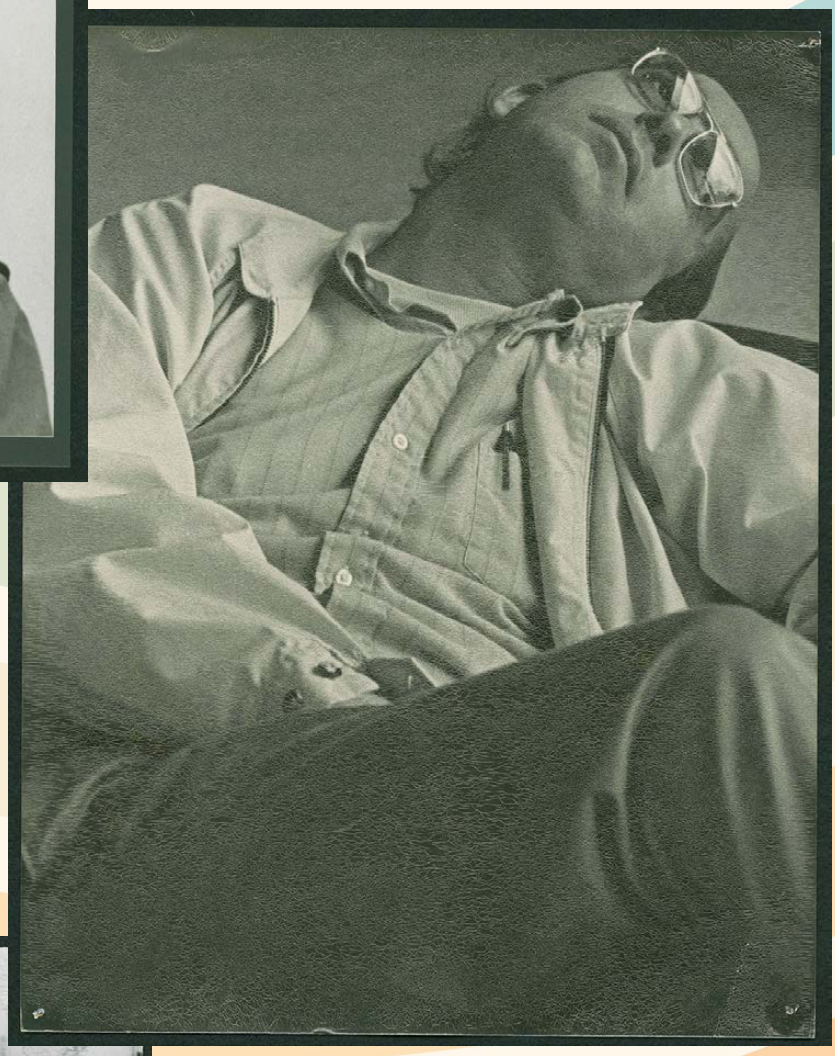
Hayes' life's work is documented in the thousands of pieces of correspondence, reports, speeches, photographs, posters, and political buttons that make up his collection of papers at the library. While he provided regular financial assistance to support the arrangement and description of the physical collection, in 2019 Hayes and his wife, Kathleen Swanson, made a significant financial contribution to support the digitization of select items from the collection. The nearly 700 items that now comprise the digital collection of the M. Hayes Mizell Papers (https://digital.library.sc.edu/collections/m-hayes-mizell-papers/) consist chiefly of reports sent to Hayes in his role with the American Friends Service Committee's Southeastern Public Education Program relating to the implementation of school desegregation, his own speeches and writings, and photographs.

— Craig M. Keeney is cataloging librarian at South Caroliniana Library.

Hayes Mizell in his office in Columbia, South Carolina, 1967. Hayes served as director of the South Carolina Community Relations Program of the American Friends Service Committee for ten years.



Left: Mizell in his office, circa 1970s. Posters of United States Attorney General Robert Kennedy and South Carolina Congressman Richard Harvey Cain appear in the background.



Right: Mizell after an AFSC Southeastern Public Education Program staff retreat

Left: Mizell in his office in Columbia, South Carolina, 1967. That same year, Hayes joined Columbia's civil rights leaders in successfully protesting the city's bid for the All-American City Award, citing its lack of progress in improving race relations.

Right: Mizell with South Carolina Governor Richard Riley and Bobby Bowers, director of the South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, in 1983.

Left: Mizell and Dr. Mary Berry at Hayes' swearing in as chairperson of the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children

MEMORIALS & HONORARIA

In Memory of:	Contribution from:
Robert Trippett Boineau	McAngus, Goudelock and Courie LLC
Eleanor McGowan Byrne	Deborah Babel
E. Crosby Lewis	Laura Sloan Crosby

Welcome, Director Saunders!

On behalf of the Executive Council and the entire University South Caroliniana Society, *Caroliniana Columns* would like to welcome Dr. Nathan Saunders as the new director of the South Caroliniana Library. Dr. Saunders comes to the SCL from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, where he served as associate director for library specialized collections. But USC isn't new to him: he earned his BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees here and previously served as curator of manuscripts at the SCL. Welcome (back), Dr. Saunders!

Letter from the President

What a great time for celebrating! After five long years, our beloved South Caroliniana Library building has been enhanced and restored even beyond its former glory. As the long-awaited reopening continues to unravel, I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity to tour and to get reacclimated to the "treasure on the Horseshoe."

Staff members are busily at work reactivating full services, and the library's new architectural features, such as the wonderful exhibit cases, allow many once-hidden treasures to be on rotational display. Let us help spread the word and encourage others to take advantage of being able once again to have a physical presence at the building, as well as the option to soon engage full steam ahead in research, with even more virtual capabilities. Be on the lookout for a bevy of special programs throughout the coming year!

On May 13 the Society hosted its 86th Annual Meeting with special guest presenter, the renowned poet Nikky Finney. Finney holds the John H. Bennett, Jr. Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Literature at USC and a Carolina Distinguished Professorship. Recently inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, this PEN and National Book Award recipient warmly enmeshed us in a communal listening cocoon. The audience was spellbound as Nikky paid tribute to the "grand archive and repository of South Carolina" — as expressed through her personal adventures and quests for information and inspiration throughout a lifelong love affair with words. The text of her talk is reprinted elsewhere in this edition.

David Banush, dean of libraries, and interim SCL director Beth Bilderback were both on hand to share remarks. Also at the meeting, we welcomed five new Executive Council members: Rachel Barnett, Dr. Mary Baskin Waters, Dr. Damien Fordham, Dr. Robert Greene and Scott Wild. We bid a fond farewell, but not goodbye — as we have future plans for them — to retiring Executive Council members Dr. Alan Coles, Dr. Jessica Elfenbein, David Hodges, Lynn Robertson, and Dr. Henrie Monteith Treadwell. We also elected Councilor Vickie Eslinger to the vice-president's chair, vacated by Lynn Robertson.

In recognition of the 60th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 1963, desegregation of the University of South Carolina, the Society was thrilled to join with USC and the Center for Civil Rights History and Research in presenting a special fall program event: "*I DO NOT WISH TO BE A SYMBOL:* A Conversation with Dr. Henrie Monteith Treadwell." A respected and world-renowned public health expert, Dr. Treadwell was one of three students of color, including Robert G. Anderson and Dr. James L. Solomon Jr., admitted to USC on that momentous date some 60 years ago. Treadwell is a Columbia native and niece of the outspoken human rights activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins.

Earning a bachelor's degree in biochemistry, Treadwell graduated from USC in 1965, with the distinction of being the university's first Black graduate since Reconstruction. Armed with a master's in biology from Boston University and a Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biology from Atlanta University, she pursued postdoctoral work at Harvard University in public health. She has had an amazing career, ranging from her work as a program director at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to a 10-year stint (1975–1985) as chair of the Division of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at Morris Brown College and, more recently, as director of Community Voices at the Morehouse School of Medicine. Her studies around the globe, particularly focusing on health care for underserved populations, have rendered her a global public health expert and activist. Although she concluded her term of service on the USCS Executive Council just this past spring, we could not help but feel especially proud of Henrie's myriad achievements. We were honored to join in heralding her work through this observance.

Columns has a new look! Editor Thom Harman, along with designer Sherry Simmons and the folks at the SCL, are working hard to find just the right design for our magazine. You may also notice that the annual report booklet will undergo significant changes in the next issue. With the gifts and accessions now fully available online, the former booklet is having growing pains and has not quite overcome the awkward "What am I finally going to look like?" stage. We do anticipate having a small number of photos alongside the somewhat abbreviated descriptions, but suggestions as to how you would like to see both periodicals revised as they mature are genuinely welcome. Keeping in mind my aforementioned statement regarding non-goodbyes to retiring councilors, Lynn Robertson, former vice president, continues to serve as the Council's representative and liaison to the recently formed publications committee.

Elsewhere in this issue, we note with sorrow the passing of our good friend and colleague Hayes Mizell. How privileged we were to have had him in our midst! Additionally, as you draw your attention to the feature on the incredible Richard Samuel Roberts photography collection, Society members should feel justly proud for our part in helping the SCL acquire this historical treasure. Our thanks to the Center for Civil Rights History and Research, who facilitated securing funding, which will enable digitization of the collection and the creation of a website. In addition to housing this magnificent treasure, SCL will soon be able to make it available for researchers for generations to come.

As we close this letter, a reminder that we are open to and welcome suggestions, questions, and ideas from you, our membership and reading audience. Finally, our heartfelt welcome to new SCL Director Nathan Saunders!

Happy holidays! We'll see you next spring!

Respectfully submitted,

Beryl

Beryl M. Dakers, President
Dr. Bobby Donaldson, Victoria Eslinger, Esq.,
and Henry Fulmer

Your USCS Council Executive Committee

Letter from the Dean of Libraries

Dear friends,

I am pleased to open my note with some long-awaited good news: the South Caroliniana Library reopened on Oct. 5. I understand how frustrating the lengthy closure and renovation process has been for users, staff, and friends of the Library. I hope that once you see the building in its fully renewed state, the memory of those delays will quickly fade, and you will agree that the SCL is ready for its next two centuries of service to the university and to the state of South Carolina. The reopening celebration will be followed by further events throughout the year, enabling many more visitors to appreciate the building, either for the first time or the fiftieth. Stay tuned as plans are finalized and shared.

I have the added pleasure of announcing that the South Caroliniana has a new director. Dr. Nathan Saunders began as the next director of the SCL on Nov. 1. Dr. Saunders previously served as associate director for library specialized collections at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. But his ties to University Libraries and the University of South Carolina already run deep: He earned BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in history from the university and previously served as curator of manuscripts at the South Caroliniana Library. He also worked as a graduate assistant in the South Carolina Political Collections in 2014–2015. We are thrilled to have recruited him back to USC and are certain he will very capably lead the SCL into its next phase. Please join me in welcoming Nathan back. Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support. Our work would not be possible without the assistance of loyal friends like you.

With thanks,

David Banush, Dean of Libraries

Report from the Interim Director

by Beth Bilderback

As I write this column, we are moving back into our building on the Horseshoe! The collections designated to be in the building were moved in June, and we have been waiting for a temporary certificate of occupation, which we now have. There is still a good bit of finish work to be done on the building, but we are looking forward to the reopening on Oct. 5. When we do reopen, our hours will be Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The staff continues to work hard on various projects. All of the barcodes on the materials moved in June had to be scanned twice into our cataloging system to change their location. This was no small task, but thanks in large part to our student assistants, this project is now complete. Nick Doyle, Graham Duncan, and Taryn Cooksey deserve full credit for physically preparing the collections to move. Craig Keeney, Brian Cuthrell, Todd Hoppock, Nicole Molineux, Abby Cole, and student workers Andrew Lankes, Showanda Mosley, Austin Ferguson, and Harrison Helms also worked to prepare the collections.

Nick also stepped into the role of project manager for the collections move. He organized staff members to reposition about 1,800 shelves before the move, developed and supervised the pre-move plan to scan barcodes to run batch jobs to put the collections "in transit," worked with the professional library moving company during the move to make certain collections were shelved properly, and supervised the post-move scanning work.

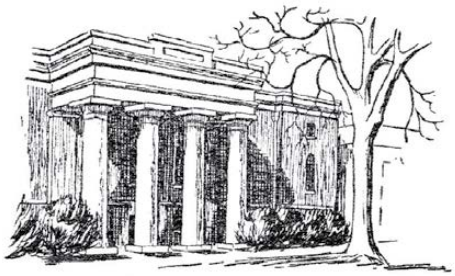
During the barcode scanning project, we identified some items that needed further attention. Graham has been working with these collections, so they can be put in place and ready for researchers. He, Taryn, and Nick are preparing our now mostly empty stacks area in Thomas Cooper Library to become a processing space. We have struggled over the years with inadequate space to process our collections, especially the multi-carton collections. Graham and Taryn have built spreadsheets to track our not-insignificant backlog, and this new space will allow them to better address our processing backlog.

With our reopening, we are reviving our ideas for programs and events to celebrate the renovation. Part of the planning includes special tours for various groups, including the Society.

I am pleased to tell you that a new director has been selected. Nathan Saunders begins his tenure on Nov. 1, 2023. Nathan may be familiar to many of you as he worked for the library as curator of manuscripts and head of collections. He is currently the associate director for library specialized collections at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. He is a true Gamecock, however, having received his BA, MA, and Ph.D. from USC. We look forward to having him join us as we enter a new era for the library.

The faculty and staff of the library continue to be most appreciative of the support shown by the Society.

ARE YOU A MEMBER?



UNIVERSITY SOUTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY

Members of the University South Caroliniana Society receive this newsletter, *Caroliniana Columns*, twice a year. If you're not a member, and you're enjoying this issue of *Caroliniana Columns*, please consider becoming a member today.

Go to **USCarolinianaSociety.org** and follow the links under "Becoming a Member." Or call 803-777-2740 to request a brochure and membership form.

The University South Caroliniana Society is the patron organization supporting the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina. The Society works to acquire and preserve materials documenting South Carolina's history and culture.

Membership dues and income from the Society's endowment are devoted primarily to the purchase and preservation of South Carolina materials for the South Caroliniana Library's collection. Scholars from around the globe use the collection to enhance our understanding of South Carolina's history and how that history has helped shape the South, the United States, and the world.

For video content, search for "University South Caroliniana Society" at www.youtube.com.

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