

A Guide to the Dorothy M. Hamm Papers, 1937-1977

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Dorothy M. Hamm Papers, 1937-1977

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Descriptive Summary

Collection number

RG 349

Language

English

Creator

Hamm, Dorothy M., 1919-2004

Extent

10 boxes.

Repository

Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Carmela Hamm, daughter of Dorothy and E. Leslie Hamm, Sr., February 2018.

Preferred Citation

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Related records include organizations Dorothy Hamm was involved with, including [RG 44 League of Women Voters](#), [RG 127 Arlington County Bicentennial Task Force](#) (unprocessed as of July 2018), [RG 165 Records of Northern Virginia Folk Festival Association](#) (unprocessed as of July 2018). Others that might shed light on the desegregation civil suit include [RG 7 Arlington County Public Schools](#), [RG 48 NAACP Arlington Branch](#), and [RG 69 Arlington County Public Schools Desegregation Materials](#). For additional records related to the John M. Langston Citizens Association, see [RG 14 Records of Arlington County Civic Federation](#) and [PG 218 Ernest E Johnson Photographs](#), which includes photographs taken at the Langston Community Center in High View Park.

Biographical/Historical Information

This collection holds the papers of Dorothy M. Hamm, a civil rights activist in Arlington, Virginia. However, almost the entire collection contains the papers she and her husband, E. Leslie Hamm, collected or created during their tenure serving their neighborhood citizens association, the John M. Langston Citizens Association for the High View Park/Hall's Hill neighborhood, a historically African-American community in Arlington.

Dorothy M. Hamm first became involved in civil rights in Arlington as a plaintiff in the civil suit filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that successfully desegregated Arlington Public Schools. Dorothy and her husband filed in May 1956 to admit their son E. Leslie Hamm Jr. to Stratford Junior High, an all-white school. Due to the Hamm's efforts, plus other Arlingtonians, Clarissa Thompson, Michael Jones, Ronald Deskins, and Lance Newman became the first black students admitted to a white school in Arlington (Stratford Junior High) on February 2, 1959. Hamm's son gained admittance to the school seven months later. Afterward, Dorothy became involved in other civil rights activities to integrate interscholastic athletics and other extracurricular activities in Arlington County Schools, to eliminate the discriminatory pupil placement form, to desegregate Arlington theaters, eliminate the poll tax, and remove race designation from public forms and voting records. Additionally, Hamm wrote several plays to promote African-American history and culture in the area. Her play *Our Heritage: Slavery to Freedom 1766-1976* became an official bicentennial event in 1976 in Arlington County. She also wrote *Our Struggle for Equality-25 Years Ago* in 1984 for Black History Month and *A Woman Called Moses* about Harriet Tubman, presented at the Northern Virginia Folk Life Festival in 1985.

Hamm was born in Caroline County, Virginia, in 1919 and grew up in Fairfax County. She attended Miner Teachers College in Washington, D.C. In the early 1940s, she started work as a file clerk for the Veterans Administration. She eventually worked as an administrative assistant in the Treasury Department, Bureau of Engraving, at the Pentagon. In 1963, she retired from government work in the Surgeon General's Office. She then served as an officer of elections in Arlington County for twenty-seven years. Hamm was a delegate to the county and state Democratic conventions in 1964. She also became one of the first African Americans elected to a political party in Arlington County, elected to represent the Woodlawn precinct for the Democratic Committee. During her political career, she served as the county assistant registrar, the chief election officer in the Woodlawn precinct, and chairwoman of community voter registration drives.

Hamm and her husband moved to the Hall's Hill/High View Park neighborhood around 1950 and built their own home at 1900 N Cameron Street. They quickly became involved in the community and were active in their neighborhood association, the John M. Langston Citizens Association. Each served on several committees and in leadership positions. Dorothy even served as president of the citizens association during the 1960s and 1970s. Her husband Leslie served as the community representative to the Arlington County neighborhood conservation program to improve streets, gutters, sidewalks, and curb appeal in the Hall's Hill/Highview Park neighborhood.

The John M. Langston Citizens Association precedes the Hamm family by a number of years. The citizens association was created in 1924 to provide services for the Hall's Hill Neighborhood. The neighborhood is bounded from the north by Lee Highway, on the east by Buchanan Street/Culpepper Street, on the west by George Mason Drive, and on the south by 16th Street/17th Road/17th Street. The neighborhood was settled by newly freed slaves just after the Civil War, making it one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in Arlington. It was named Hall's Hill because the upper portion of the neighborhood originally was owned by William Marcey and Basil Hall. Hall sold much of his land to his freed slaves. The neighborhood was renamed High View Park in 1965 because of the spectacular view of Arlington County it offers. At the time, some residents thought the neighborhood was renamed to make it more palatable to prospective white residents. In the 1800s, the neighborhood was relatively rural and simple. Residents had large gardens and raised hogs, chickens, and horses. Eventually, residents established their own stores and churches during the early 1900s. Until the 1950s, the neighborhood was separated on three sides from adjoining all-white

neighborhoods by an 8-foot-high wooden fence, built by white homeowners whose houses backed up on lots in the Hall's Hill neighborhood. Despite being cut off from their surroundings and many county services during the early 20th century, the neighborhood developed its own fire station, community-wide events and celebrations, block parties, and even a community baseball team, known as the Virginia White Sox. Since the latter half of the 20th century, residents and the citizens' association fought to keep their neighborhood's character and space alive. Nearby Arlington Hospital and WETA-TV attempted to build medical offices and satellites in the neighborhood. White, middle-class residents starting buying homes in the neighborhood for the first time in the late 1970s due to the area's lower than average sale prices.

In 2018, the John M. Langston Citizens Association noted on its website that the neighborhood still maintained "an identity as a strong black community, the High View Park is a neighborhood is better represented by more racial diversity as new residents moved into the neighborhood. These new and long term residents still work together to maintain the historical, cultural and aesthetic values of the High View Park Neighborhood." The association still works to promote civic spirit and participation and foster communication among residents and property owners, as well as to preserve, enhance, and promote general welfare and safety of the neighborhood.

In 1987, Dorothy Hamm moved back to Caroline County, Virginia. She died on May 14, 2004.

Scope and Content

The materials in this collection have been created and managed by many different members of the John M. Langston Citizens Association. Dorothy Hamm and E. Leslie Hamm, Sr. were the last owners of the collection, both of whom were active members of the association since the early 1950s until the 1980s. As such, few items in the collection may be related to the other civic activities of Dorothy Hamm, such as Hamm's political and playwriting careers. However, since such materials are far and few between, and interwoven into the vast collection of Citizens Association materials, it is difficult to tell whether Hamm simply filed materials together or whether she promoted these activities in the Citizens Association.

The collection spans just over three linear feet and covers the years 1937 to 1977. The bulk of materials date from the late 1940s to late 1960s. Materials cover the activities of the John M. Langston Citizens Association, which promotes civic participation and represents residents' interests in the High View Park/Hall's Hill neighborhood in North Arlington. The collection features a large selection of meeting minutes, mostly from general meetings of the association. Some extant minutes from special committees, as well as the Colored Federation of Citizens' Associations of Arlington, of which the association was a member, remain. The collection also contains a large portion of financial records, which include reports, receipts, check stubs and money draft records, and lists of which members paid monthly dues. There are some membership applications and cards; however, the lists of monthly dues provide a better record of participants.

Files related to issues and initiatives the association tackled, which appear to mainly have been collected by the Dorothy and E. Leslie Hamm, comprise another large part of the collection. Most of these records relate to the Neighborhood Conservation program Arlington County started in the 1960s to help residents improve their neighborhoods through sidewalk, curb, and gutter installation; street, traffic and parking improvement; recreation enterprises, like parks and playgrounds; and other similar enterprises. The collection here provides excellent resources that capture the High View Park/Hall's Hill neighborhood's participation, and also contains reports and minutes E. Leslie Hamm collected attending meetings that relate to the activities of other neighborhoods in Arlington. Another rather large collection of these records relates to clean-up/beautification of High View Park/Hall's Hill that Dorothy Hamm spearheaded.

Other materials include one photograph, and correspondence and publications received by the association from other organizations in the County.

Index Terms

Subjects:

Citizens' associations
Community organization.
African American neighborhoods
Hall's Hill (Arlington, Va.)
High View Park (Arlington, Va.)
Hamm, Dorothy M., 1919-2004
Hamm, E. Leslie (Edward Leslie), 1917-1913
Arlington (Va.)
Arlington County (Va.)

Arrangement

The materials arrived grouped roughly according to subject matter. The archivist kept original order when possible. However, many disparate materials (outside of bound meeting minutes) were loose or kept in unlabeled folders and envelopes. The archivist developed seven series to organize materials, all based on subject matter. When possible, original file names have been preserved in quotes (" ") and additions to titles from the archivist have been included in brackets ([]) where clarification was needed.

Series 1 contains the meeting minutes of the association, arranged in chronological order. Most of these are minutes for general meetings of the association. A few volumes contain meeting minutes of the Colored Federation of Citizens Associations of Arlington, and special committees, such as the Ways and Means Committee of the association. Folders containing such special meeting minutes are labeled as such. Several bound volumes had loose papers or items stapled to pages. For preservation purposes, the archivist removed such items and placed them in folders with the dates noted.

Series 2 houses the financial records of the John M. Langston Citizens Association. This series is divided into four subseries: Reports and Notes; Banking and Accounting; Taxes; and Miscellaneous. Within the subseries, files are arranged in chronological order.

Series 3 contains the membership records of the association (except for the membership dues payment lists, which were found with financial records and can be located in *Series 2*). *Series 4* holds the files detailing community initiatives the association tackled. It is divided into five subseries based on subject matter, including Neighborhood Conservation Program; Clean-Up and Beautification; Recreation and Education; Safety; and Events/Miscellaneous.

Series 5 is comprised of materials the association collected from various organizations in the county, some of which they held membership. *Series 6* contains the single photograph found, potentially of an association meeting in the 1950s. *Series 7*, Subject Files, holds all other miscellaneous materials that did not fit well in any of the above series.

Oversized materials from this collection are filed separately, as are the artifacts, two ink stamps with the association's name and address for envelopes and letterhead.

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