

# **Doris E. Saunders Papers**

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December 26, 2013

Chicago Public Library: Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Chicago Public Library: Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection
<b>Creator</b>	Saunders, Doris E.
<b>Title</b>	Doris E. Saunders Papers
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	Bulk, 1940-1992
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1894-2005
<b>Extent</b>	54.0 Linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Doris Saunders was born August 8, 1921 in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from Englewood High School in Chicago, Saunders attended Northwestern University and Central YMCA College in Chicago. In 1941 Saunders took a Chicago Public Library Training Class and began work as a librarian for the Chicago Public Library. She left the Chicago Public Library to start a corporate library at Johnson Publishing Company in 1949. In the late 1970s Saunders moved to Mississippi and was Professor and Chair of the Department of Mass Communications at Jackson State University until retiring in 1991. The Doris E. Saunders Papers span from circa 1894 to 2005 with the bulk of the material ranging from 1970 to 1992. The Papers are arranged into nine series: "Biographical," "Manuscripts," "Correspondence," "Professional," "Research," "Serials," "Audio-Visual Materials," "Memorabilia," and "Photographs."</p>

## Biographical/Historical note

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On August 8, 1921 in Chicago, Illinois Doris Elaine Evans Saunders was born to John Alvesta Stewart Evans and Thelma Camille Rice Evans. After her father died in 1935, Doris and her family moved in with her maternal grandmother and step-grandfather at 5542 South Lafayette Avenue. Doris Saunders graduated from Englewood High School in Chicago in 1938. After graduating high school, Doris attended both Northwestern University (1938-1940) and Central YMCA College (1940-1941). She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Central YMCA College, now Roosevelt University. In 1942, after graduating from Central YMCA College, Doris completed the Chicago Public Library Training Class.

In May 1942, she became a Junior Library Assistant and shortly thereafter she passed the Civil Service examination for Senior Library Assistant. She was first assigned to the Book Selection Department, was later transferred to the Hill Branch Library, and then moved to the George M. Pullman Branch Library. While at Pullman, Saunders was appointed the first African American reference librarian to work in the Social Science and Business Division of the main library.

In January 1949 Saunders wrote a letter to John H. Johnson, who had just purchased a building that he was renovating for Ebony magazine offices. She suggested that he establish a special library for his editorial and advertising staff and clients. Saunders envisioned that the library would document African American experience in the United States. Saunders was quickly called in for an interview and on February 1, 1949 she became responsible for starting the library at Johnson Publishing Company. She was promoted to the Director of the Book Publishing Division between 1960 and 1961. During her time with Johnson Publishing, Doris Saunders edited *The Day They Marched* (1963), *The Kennedy Years and the Negro* (1964), and compiled the *Negro Handbook* (1966).

On October 28, 1950 Doris Saunders married Vincent E. Saunders, Jr. The couple had two children, Ann C. Saunders Vivian (February 23, 1952- ) and Vincent E. Saunders, III (January 28, 1954- ). Doris and Vincent E. Saunders, Jr. divorced on August 20, 1963.

In 1966, following a policy disagreement, Saunders left Johnson Publishing Company and established her own public relations firm, Plus Factor and Information. In addition to running Plus Factor and Information, Saunders also wrote a food column and two social columns for the Chicago Daily Defender from 1966-1968. One of her social columns was titled, "Confetti." She also was a columnist for the Chicago Courier from 1968 to 1970. In addition, Saunders had a local radio show on WBEE, "The Doris Saunders Show," where she interviewed guests at lunchtime at Lake Meadows Restaurant and Lounge. She later wrote and served as Associate Producer for *Our People* on WTTW-TV, a magazine-format television program that ran from 1968 to 1970.

In 1968 Saunders became the Director of Community Relations for Chicago State University and later added the duties of Acting Director of Institutional Development. From 1970 to 1972, she was Staff Associate in the Office of the Chancellor at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She left this job at John H. Johnson's request to return to her former position as Director of the Book Division at Johnson Publishing Company.

In 1976, after Saunders' children had completed college, she attended Boston University and completed a Master of Science in Journalism from the School of Public Communication, and a Master of Arts in Afro-American Studies; graduating with both degrees in 1977. From 1983 to 1984 she studied toward a Ph.D. in history at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. At the same time she commuted to Chicago on weekends, at John H. Johnson's expense, to continue working on book editing, co-writing and layout design. One of Saunders' works was *Black Society*, co-written with Geraldyn Major and published in 1976.

Saunders began working at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi in January 1978 for a one-semester writer-in-residence position. When the University then offered her a permanent position as Professor and Coordinator of Print Journalism, she left Johnson Publishing Company and moved to Jackson, Mississippi. She was Professor and Chair of the Department of Mass Communications at Jackson State University until her retirement in 1991.

In 1982, Saunders founded Ancestor Hunting, a genealogical research company, and appointed her children as officers for the business. She spent several years building the business through mail order genealogy kits, publication of the company's newsletter *Kith and Kin*, and attendance at genealogy events and conferences. Saunders continued these efforts throughout the 1980s and after her retirement from Jackson State University in 1991.

Saunders also continued her work with Johnson Publishing after her official retirement from Jackson State. In 1999, Saunders edited, *Special Moments In African-American History, 1955-1996: The Photographs of Moneta Sleet, Jr.* published by Johnson Publishing Company.

In addition to her diverse professional career, Saunders was involved in a number of professional organizations. She served as a board member of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters and as board member of the American Civil Liberties Union Illinois Chapter. She was also a member of the Chicago Leadership Resource Program, National Association of Media Women, Chicago Publicity Club, Alpha Gamma Pi Sorority, and Black Advisory Commission for the 1980 census in Washington, D.C.

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## Scope and Contents note

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The Doris E. Saunders Papers include materials related to Saunders' work as a librarian for the Chicago Public Library, corporate librarian at Johnson Publishing Company, writer, and professor at Jackson State University. The papers span the years circa 1894 to 2005 and are organized into nine series: "Biographical," "Manuscripts," "Correspondence," "Professional," "Research," "Serials," "Audio-Visual Materials," "Memorabilia," and "Photographs." The bulk of the collection consists of administrative documents, research files, photographs, correspondence, and newsletters.

## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Information**

Chicago Public Library: Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection

### **Conditions Governing Access note**

Some material may be restricted for use.

### **Processing Information note**

Processed by CLIR funded Black Metropolis Research Consortium “Color Curtain Processing Project.”  
By Mooni Abdus-Salam, Lisa Calahan, Meghan Courtney, Dominique Fuqua, and Beth Loch. December 16, 2013.

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Archival Materials note**

Johnson Publishing Company Photographic Archive, Johnson Publishing Company.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **Corporate Name(s)**

- Ancestor Hunting Incorporated.
- Chicago Public Library. Chicago Illinois.
- Jackson State University. Jackson, Mississippi.
- Johnson Publishing Company. Chicago, Illinois.

### **Occupation(s)**

- African American librarians.

### **Personal Name(s)**

- Evans, Thelma C.

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### **Cited Sources**

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Dandridge, Vonita White. "Doris Saunders." Notable Black American Women. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005.

## Collection Inventory

### Series I. Biographical, 1918-2005

#### Scope and Contents note

Materials in this series consist of personal papers pertaining to different aspects of Saunders' life and her family members. This series includes two subseries: "Doris E. Saunders" and "Thelma Evans and the Rice Hotel." The papers regarding her personal life range from minute things such as lunch receipts and notes of correspondence, to larger events like travel brochures and documents from various vacations. Much of this series contains notes written by Doris about the Saunders and Evans family history, including family trees and handwritten notes tracing her family ancestry. There are also materials that reflect her professional life, such as awards and conference brochures and programs. Additional materials consist of family papers, such as items from and photographs of her daughter, Anne Saunders and her mother, Thelma Evans.

### Subseries 1. Doris E. Saunders, 1920-2005

#### Scope and Contents note

This subseries includes scrapbooks of correspondence (mostly greeting cards) kept by Doris Saunders, student records, journals, planners, funeral programs, diplomas, financial materials, and handwritten notes. Also included are drafts, typed and handwritten, of Saunders' autobiography which was never finished. Doris kept documentation on her family members as well, including notes about her daughter, Ann.

**Box**

Doris E. Saunders, 1920-2005

1-7



## Subseries 2. Thelma Evans and the Rice Hotel,

**Subseries 2. Thelma Evans and the Rice Hotel, circa 1918-1981****Scope and Contents note**

Thelma Evans was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on October 29, 1901. Evans left Chicago for Phoenix, Arizona between 1944 and 1945 where she operated the Rice Hotel, a business started by her father, Hughie Henry Rice. The Rice Hotel was located at 515 E. Jefferson Street, near the downtown railroad station. As one of the few hotels open to African-American travelers in the area, regular guests included Pullman porters, dining car waiters and railway mail clerks. Evans lived in Phoenix until 1981 when she suffered a heart attack and moved to Jackson, Mississippi to live with Doris. The papers of Thelma Evans have been collected by Doris Saunders and range from personal notes and greeting cards to professional records. The bulk of the material in this subseries contains information and records on the Rice Hotel in Arizona. These materials include detailed records on the hotel such as guest logs, correspondence, and property management records.

**Box**

Thelma Evans and the Rice Hotel, circa 1918-1981

8-10

**Series II. Manuscripts, 1934-2000****Scope and Contents note**

Materials in this series consist of drafts of written work either by Doris herself or people with which she was in correspondence. Her own work includes academic essays and a column titled "Confetti," which she wrote for The Defender on a regular basis. There are also program drafts for the television program titled "Our People" of which she was a producer. This series also includes drafts of short stories and essays sent to her for review.

**Box**

Manuscripts, 1934-2000

11-12

## Series III. Correspondence,

**Series III. Correspondence, 1947-2004****Scope and Contents note**

This series contains correspondence created or collected by Doris Saunders. Files include personal and family correspondence, professional correspondence, post cards, and greeting cards. Notable items include letters from Saunders' daughter Ann and correspondence from colleagues at Johnson Publishing Company.

**Box**

Correspondence, 1947-2004

13-14

**Series IV. Professional, 1942-2004****Scope and Contents note**

This series contains files related to Saunders' professional life as a genealogist, business owner, professor of journalism, academic department head, librarian, book editor, television writer, and community relations director. The series is divided into four subseries: "Ancestor Hunting," "Jackson State," "Johnson Publishing," and "Additional Professional Activities."

**Subseries 1. Ancestor Hunting Incorporated, 1973-1995****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries contains materials related to Ancestor Hunting, the genealogy company Saunders founded with her children, Ann C. Saunders Vivian and Vincent E. Saunders, III in 1982. Files include correspondence with customers, accounting and sales documents, genealogical research kits sold by the company, genealogy research notes penned by Saunders, and materials related to genealogy events where Saunders promoted her business. Drafts and final copies of Ancestor Hunting's genealogy

**Subseries 2. Jackson State University,**

newsletter, Kith and Kin, are also located in this subseries. Additional notes related to Saunders' genealogical research are also located in Series V. Research.

**Box**

Ancestor Hunting Incorporated, 1973-1995

15-17

**Subseries 2. Jackson State University, 1956-2004****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries consists of documents related to Saunders' work as a Writer-in-Residence, Professor of Journalism, and Chairwoman of the Department of Mass Communication at Jackson State University. Files include course outlines and student work, departmental memoranda and event programs, copies of the university newspaper, and employee documents. This series also includes materials related to Saunders' presentations on the role of media in history, such as the influence of African-American media in the Civil Rights Movement.

**Box**

Jackson State University, 1956-2004

18-22

**Subseries 3. Johnson Publishing Company, 1942-1999****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries contains materials produced and collected during Saunders' employment with Johnson Publishing Company from 1949 to 1966 and again in the early 1970s. She resumed intermittent work with Johnson Publishing after her retirement from Jackson State in 1991. Files include correspondence with John H. Johnson and other staff, employee memoranda, galleys and draft pages for Johnson Publishing Company books such as Black Society and Negro Handbook, planning documents for Ebony Jr!, draft materials for a book on Pulitzer Prize winning Johnson Publishing Company photographer

**Subseries 4. Additional Professional Activities,**

Monetta Sleet Jr., and administrative documents related to Johnson Publishing Company circulation and marketing studies.

**Box**

Johnson Publishing Company, 1942-1999

23-28

**Subseries 4. Additional Professional Activities, circa 1968-1985****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries contains files related to Saunders' additional work as a community relations specialist, census worker, and television writer. This subseries includes files from Saunders' time as a Director of Community Relations at Chicago State University (1968-1970), scripts from the television show *Our People* aired on Public Television (1968-1970), and her work on the 1980 Federal Census.

**Box**

Additional Professional Activities, circa 1968-1985

29

**Series V. Research, 1944-2001****Scope and Contents note**

This series consists of research files kept by Doris Saunders. Subjects of her research include Black church women in leadership roles, articles on lynching, presentations she gave, and genealogical research. Newspaper articles make up the bulk of the materials; however, there are also handouts, lecture materials, brochures, and handwritten notes. A portion of this series represents Saunders' original alphabetical arrangement of documents related to her research interests and original order was maintained where possible.

**Box**

## Series VI. Serials,

30-43

Research, 1944-2001

**Series VI. Serials, 1928-1999****Scope and Contents note**

This series contains magazines, academic journals, and news publications collected by Saunders over the course of her life. Notable publications include: Today's Mississippi, Tomorrow's South (1988-1991), Patterns (1978-1979), The Jackson Advocate, Ebony Jr!, Ebony South Africa, and several academic journals related to journalism.

**Box**

44-47

Serials, 1928-1999

**Series VII. Audio-Visual Materials, circa 1970-1995****Scope and Contents note**

This series includes audio and visual recordings of music, speeches, interviews and events that Saunders attended and/or participated in. Audio material includes audiocassette tapes from the Second Annual Conference on Issues in Ethnicity and Mental Health, and an audiocassette book of Succeeding Against the Odds by John H. Johnson. Videocassette tapes include "Dollars and Demographics," interviews featuring Saunders and others; and home taped television programs. In addition, there are five unidentified reels of magnetic tape.

**Box**

48-49

Audio-Visual Materials, circa 1970-1995

**Series VIII. Memorabilia, 1919-2004**

## Series IX. Photographs,

**Scope and Contents note**

This series contains three dimensional objects collected by Doris Saunders.

**Box**

Memorabilia, 1919-2004

50-51

**Series IX. Photographs, circa 1894-1998****Scope and Contents note**

This series consists of photographs of events such as “Women in Media” conference in April 1978, photographs related to Johnson Publishing Company, and Saunders’ family and friends. Contact prints and negatives are also included in this series.

**Box**

Photographs, circa 1894-1998

52-62