

# Carrie Meek - James N. Eaton, Sr. Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum

Historic Carnegie Library, Florida A&M University  
Tallahassee, Florida



In 1971, the Florida Legislature mandated the creation of a repository to “serve the state by collecting and preserving source material on and about African Americans from ancient to present times.” This mandate gave birth to what would later become the Black Archives Research Center and Museum. The center was founded in 1976 by Florida A&M University history professor, Dr. James N. Eaton. It officially opened in historic Carnegie Library on FAMU’s campus. Since that time, the Black Archives has served as a research center for individuals of various ages, ethnicities, and interests (in 1906, Andrew Carnegie donated \$10,000 to build a new library for the Florida State College for Colored Students, now Florida A&M University).

The new two-story, brick facility officially opened to the public in 1908. It was the first Carnegie Library built on a black land-grant college campus. The facility boasted modern amenities such as electricity, indoor plumbing and water supplied by the city. In later years, the Library served as an art gallery, religious center, and in 1976, became the founding home of the Black Archives Research Center and Museum, which also in 1976, was listed on the National Register of Historic Place). By functioning both as a repository for archival records and a museum for historical regalia, the center continues to render academic support to educational institutions, civic, political, religious and social groups, as well as, public and private businesses throughout Florida and the nation.

Although designated as a statewide facility, the Black Archives quickly evolved into an important regional, national and international research center for studies pertaining to African-American culture and history. Due to generous contributions from the public, the center's holdings consist of more than 500,000 individual archival records and more than 5,000 individual museum artifacts. The center is one of 10 black archives in the United States and is one of the largest repositories relating to African-American history and culture in the Southeast. More than 160,000 people visit the center annually, or are educated through the Archives' numerous outreach programs. Many reference requests and visitors to the museum include people from throughout the United States and other parts of the world including Africa, Canada, England, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Switzerland, and the West Indies.

Florida A&M University (FAMU) is Florida's only historically black, state-supported institution of higher education. The University and its graduates have had a profound impact on the economic, educational, social, political and religious development, which has helped advance African Americans in Florida and neighboring states. On May 6, 1996, the FAMU campus and its surrounding community were designated by the United States Department of the Interior as a National Historic District based on the institution's historic significance and the architectural style of its oldest buildings. The designation also recognized the national achievements and contributions of FAMU students, alumni, faculty and staff, both past and present. The historic district designation resulted from cooperative efforts between FAMU, the Black Archives, the Florida Bureau of Historical Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and FAMU's School of Architecture. The University and the research center both continue to play major roles in fostering improved race relations between America's diverse and constantly growing populations.

## The Founders

The Honorable Joe Lang Kershaw (1911-1999), a Florida A&M College graduate, was the first African American elected to serve in the Florida Legislature since Reconstruction. He rendered 14 years of service (1968-1982). In 1971, he maneuvered Florida Statute 241.477 through the Legislature, which led to the creation of the Black Archives. In recognition of his efforts, a special room on the first floor of Carnegie Library, the home of the Black Archives, was designated to him.

Next, Florida State Senator Arthenia L. Joyner (D-Tampa) who earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a juris doctor degree from Florida A&M University; and while attending FAMU, she was arrested twice during protests to desegregate Tallahassee movie theatres. She also participated in the first civil rights demonstrations in Tampa, and was arrested in Washington, D.C. for her participation in civil rights activities. In 1969, she served as a legal assistant to the Honorable Joe Lang Kershaw, the first African-American member of the Florida Legislature since Reconstruction and lead sponsor of the bill that created the Black Archives.

Dr. James N. Eaton, Sr. (1930-2004), is the *founder and first director of the Black Archives*. He , earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn. Afterward, he worked as a history professor at Miles College in Fairfield, Ala., and a patrolman and assistant principal in Richmond, Va. before accepting a position as professor of history at Florida A&M University in 1958. Between 1969 and 1977, Dr. Eaton served as chairman of FAMU's Department of History, Geography and African-American Studies. In 1975, he was named founding archivist, curator and director of what is now the Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum. For the next three decades, he helped amass a collection of memorabilia and printed records that now comprise one of the region's largest collections of first-source material relating to the history, culture and contributions of people of African decent living in the United States. The diverse collection was built on the premise of his personal motto that "African-American History is the History of America." Dr. Eaton is nationally and internationally known for his work and expertise in the areas of American, African-American, Southern, and Russian history. He was selected "Most Outstanding Teacher of the Year" 25 times in his 45 years of teaching at FAMU. Anyone who attended his class or listened to one of his lectures was considered "Eatonized." In 1978, Dr. Eaton was named FAMU's first "Distinguished Professor." Eaton was a key player in having the historic Carnegie Library placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The campus and surrounding community of FAMU was designated a National Historic District in 1998. In 1981, Dr. Eaton, with a group of dedicated community members, co-founded the Friends of the Black Archives, a non-profit volunteer group dedicated to the promotion and preservation of African-American history. It was founded to support and incite greater interest in the center and its public services. In 1983, the James N. Eaton, Sr. Endowment was established to render further support to the museum and archives.

The noted archivist, curator, educator, and historian was the recipient of hundreds of accolades and awards. Some of his most prestigious honors include being named “Professor of the Year” in 1991 by Florida’s Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). In 1997, Florida Memorial College bestowed upon him the Doctorate of Humane Letters. After nearly five decades of dedicated scholarship and public service Dr. Eaton announced his retirement in 2003. That same year, the university bestowed upon him the title of Professor Emeritus. Additionally in 2003, in recognition of his dedication in the areas of education, American, African-American and world history, a bill was introduced in the Florida Legislature that proposed naming the new Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum expansion facility the Meek-Eaton Building in the honor of Eaton and his close friend and colleague, U.S. Congresswoman Carrie P. Meek (retired), who helped secure funds for the new facility. Hence, U.S. Congresswoman Carrie P. Meek (D-Florida), a six-term U.S. Congresswoman (retired) and 1946 FAMCEE graduate, was a vanguard in securing funds to expand the Black Archives facility. In 2006, the Florida Legislature co-named the new facility in her honor. Meek has enjoyed an historic trailblazing career as a public servant, college administrator and educator. She first made history in 1978, when she was elected to the Florida House of Representatives. In 1982, she became the first African-American woman elected to the Florida State Senate. After 14 years in the Florida Legislature, Meek was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. She was the first African-American lawmaker elected to represent Florida in Congress since Reconstruction. Meek was a strong advocate for underserved populations. She retired from Congress in 2003, and was succeeded by her son, Sen. Kendrick Meek. She returned to Dade County where she dedicates her time and service to the Carrie P. Meek Foundation, a non-profit corporation. In 2006, the Carrie Meek - James N. Eaton, Sr. Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum, located on FAMU's campus, was co-named in her honor.

## **Archival Collections and Holdings**

The majority of the center’s archival holdings consist of records relating to the history of Africans and African Americans, especially their institutions and organizations. The center has an impressive holding of manuscripts, rare books, journals, magazines, maps, newspapers, and photographs. Individuals from an array of professions, as well as, businesses, social, civic and religious groups donated the majority of our museum and archival material. Some of these records are unique resources that are not available at other research facilities.

## Archival Collections

- Afro American and Central Life Insurance Companies Collection
- Alonzo “Jake” Gaither – Black College Football Collection
- Benjamin and Dorothy Holmes – Black Church Collection
- Black Archives Obituary Collection
- Carrie Meek – African Americans in Congress Collection
- D.E. Williams – Negro Schools in Florida Photographic Collection
- Florida A&M University College of Law Collection
- Florida A&M University Hospital Collection
- Florida and Herbert Parker – Masters Golfing Tournament Newspaper Coverage Collection
- Florida’s Black Junior Colleges Collection
- Floy Britt – 4-H Collection
- Genevieve J. Wheeler – Black Home Economics Collection
- George W. Conoly – Florida A&M University Alumni Association and National Alumni Association Collection
- Gilbert Porter – Desegregation Files
- Joe Nash – African American Dance Collection
- John F. Matheus – Harlem Renaissance Collection
- Leedell Neyland – Florida Interscholastic Athletic Association
- Leedell Neyland and Gilbert Porter – Florida State Teachers Association Collection
- Martha Leffall– Leffall Family Memorial Collection
- National Negro Home Demonstration Agents Collection
- Official Rosewood Incident Papers
- Ruby Diamond – Music Collection
- S. Randolph Edmonds – Drama Collection
- William P. Foster – Marching Band Memorabilia
- Willie Ziegler White – Florida Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers Association



Black Archives' student staff members: (front row, left to right) – Sherrod Taylor and Janyla Manley; (back row, left to right) – Kiona Davis, Caesarea McCord and De'Vante Johnson.

## Past Activities

February 18, 2015, FAMU Student Health and the Meek-Eaton Black Archives co-sponsored "Black Health and Social Justice," the second installment in a three-part series celebrating Black History Month 2015.



Panelists spoke about the importance of health and statistics about health in the Black community. From left: Dr. Huberta Jackson-Lowman, FAMU associate professor of psychology; Dr. Cynthia Seaborn, research associate in the FAMU Center for Health Equity; Mr. Dana Cooper, health chair for the FAMU NAACP; and Dr. Richard Gragg, associate professor and associate director of the FAMU Environmental Sciences Institute.

On September 24, 2016 the Meek-Eaton Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum launched a “Friend Raiser” event to show appreciation and enhance the center’s membership database to the University and community. The event also served as an opportunity for the general public to hear the future vision of Carnegie Center’s Director, Dr. Nashid Madyun.



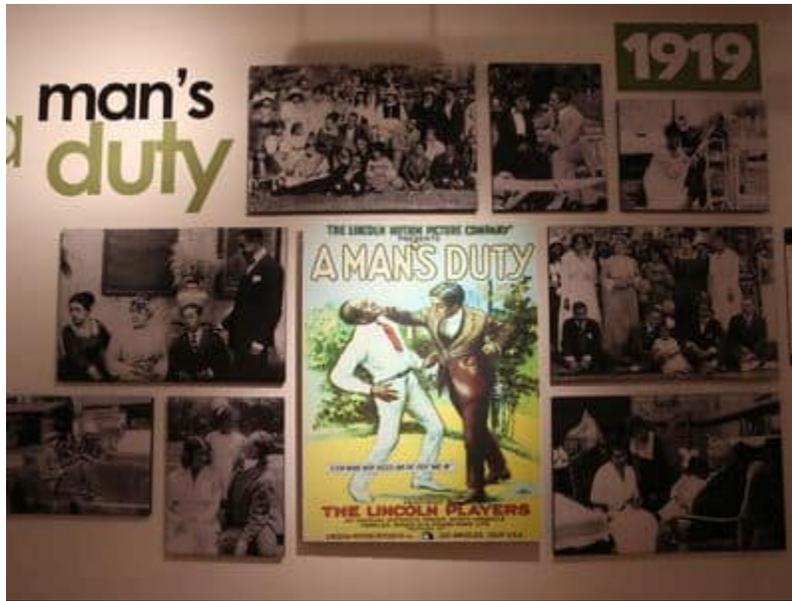
A visitor enjoys a special exhibition on display at the museum, “The Lincoln Motion Picture Company | A Tribute to Excellence in Race Cinema,” a series of the Montague Collection.



Student musician, Austin Paul Conner, of the popular jazz group, “Soul Xone,” renders jazzy melodies for event’s participants.



Clint Byrd amongst the memorabilia from the Lincoln Motion Picture Company collection, on display at FAMU's Meek Eaton Black Archives (Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat).



Memorabilia from the Lincoln Motion Picture Company collection, on display at FAMU's Meek Eaton Black Archives building through February. The production company, which was the first film company owned and operated by African Americans (Photo: Joe Rondone/*Democrat*).

The museum component of the Meek-Eaton Black Archives is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. There is no admission fee. Museum tours are self-guided. Groups of 10 or more people can call to schedule a guided tour. Groups requesting guided tours usually receive a brief welcome, introduction, or presentation on a special area of interest before viewing the exhibits. For additional tour information, please call (850) 599-3020. The location: 445 Gamble Street in Tallahassee, Florida 32307.  
<http://famu.edu/index.cfm?MEBA&Home>