PRESERVING PEELER’S PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY

THE COLLECTION CAME TO JCSU IN 37 RUBBERMAID TUBS

NUMBER OF GRANTS TO FUND THE PROJECT (SO FAR): 3
- LYRASIS GRANT (NOV 2011)
- LSTA (JUNE 2013)
- LYRASIS GRANT (OCT 2014)

THE COLLECTION IS ARRANGED INTO SERIES BASED ON THE CLIENT’S LAST NAME, A THROUGH Z, WITH THE ADDITION OF AN MC AND MISCELLANEOUS (FOR ENVELOPES NOT LABELED)

WE’VE HAD 15 INTERNS WORK ON THE PROJECT

CURRENTLY WORKING ON AN EXHIBIT OF THE COLLECTION, TITLED “Peeler’s Portrait Studio: Capturing Charlotte’s African American Community 1954-2003”

James G. Peeler, born February 16, 1928, was a Charlotte native and graduate of Johnson C. Smith University (1951). After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Peeler enrolled in the New York Institute of Photography. His work as a photographer in Charlotte spanned over half a century, from the 1950’s to 2003. He was best known for his work as a portrait photographer with exceptional re-touching and hand-coloring skills, which satisfied a strong base of return customers. He also enjoyed still life photography and worked briefly as a product catalog photographer. And occasionally, he took photographs and wrote nature stories for the Charlotte News. Peeler’s career as a photographer was highlighted in the documentary, “Portraits of a Movement,” and his work has been exhibited in the Mecklenburg County Public Library and Charlotte’s Museum of the New South. Additionally, Peeler made photographic contributions to several books, including the "Black America Series Charlotte, North Carolina.”

Early in his career, Mr. Peeler traveled across the state taking photographs of students in segregated schools. He captured the highlights of the lives of many black Charlotteans, taking photographs at proms, weddings, family reunions, graduations, and funerals. He also captured images of political, social, and religious activities. He often managed to catch his subjects in a spontaneous documentation of daily life, creating frozen moments in time. His work includes several street scenes of downtown Charlotte, as well as many of the city’s African American neighborhoods and homes.

Among other things, Peeler photographed the inspiring and the ugly moments of the civil rights movement in Charlotte during the 1960’s. He covered the protests and sit-ins in Charlotte and Rock Hill, South Carolina; some of his subjects included Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, politician Shirley Chisholm, and local civil rights leader Kelly Alexander.

Many of his photographs are some of the only visual documents of Charlotte’s African American neighborhoods, most of which were largely eradicated by government-funded urban renewal projects of the 1950’s and 70’s.

JCSU OFFICIALLY ACQUIRED THE COLLECTION ON JULY 15, 2011.
I BEGAN WORK PROCESSING THE COLLECTION ON AUGUST 15, 2012.

13,587 PHOTO PRINT LAB ENVELOPES
SUB-SERIES ORGANIZATION:
EACH ENVELOPE IS LABELED WITH A CLIENT NAME, WHICH BECAME THE BASIS FOR OUR ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM

USED GOOGLEDOCS SPREADSHEETS TO CATALOG THE COLLECTION: IT ALLOWS MULTIPLE PEOPLE TO WORK ON PROCESSING SIMULTANEOUSLY

TO DATE, WE HAVE PROCESSED A LITTLE OVER 50 PERCENT OF THE COLLECTION
*REORDESSED INTO ARCHIVAL NEGATIVE AND PRINT SIZES, AND NUMBERED & CARDED

53,158 NEGATIVES (MOSTLY 4X5 BLACK & WHITE)
19,502 PRINTS (MOSTLY CONTACT PRINTS)
2,902 NUMBER OF DIGITIZED IMAGES (WE ARE DIGITIZING BOTH NEGATIVES AND PRINTS USING EPSON SCANNERS AND ADOBE IMAGES SOFTWARE)

Cheryl Tava photo Archives
James B. Duke Memorial Library
Johnson C Smith University

ALL DIGITIZED IMAGES VIEWABLE ON SMUGMUG: PEELERSPORTRAITSTUDIO.SMUGMUG.COM
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