

Building Community While Building a Library:

Community Partnerships and the Creation of the Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum

Krystal Appiah
RMBS Preconference
June 19, 2009

Mayme A. Clayton Library & Museum (MCLM)

- Believed to be the largest privately owned collection of rare books, films, manuscripts, photographs on African American history and culture.
- Collected over 40 years by former librarian Mayme Clayton.
- Scheduled to open to public in 2010.

MCLM Mission

“to collect, preserve, exhibit and celebrate the unique history and cultural heritage of Americans of African descent and thereby help to provide a more complete view of American history”

Foundations to Achieve Mission

- Collection
- Facility in which to operate
- Strong institutional and community relationships

The Collection

Brief Biography of Mayme Clayton

Birth of the Collection

Mayme Clayton – Early Life

- Born August 4, 1923 in Van Buren, AK
- Father owned general store, mother was homemaker
- Parents took children to hear notable Black lecturers, such as Mary McLeod Bethune
- Moved to New York City after high school where met Andrew Lee Clayton
- Couple married in 1946 & moved to Los Angeles where they raised 3 sons

Mayme Clayton - Librarian

- Continued her education
 - BA, History, University of California, Berkeley
 - MLIS, Goddard College
- Librarian at Doheny Library at University of Southern California, 1952-1957
- Librarian at University of California, Los Angeles, 1957-1972 – law librarian & then librarian for newly created African American Studies Center

Mayme Clayton - Collector

- Frustrated that institutions not preserving early and rare books and documents by & about African Americans – particularly in Western United States
- Began collecting in earnest in late 1960s, using her own money
- Collected/purchased items from garage sales, flea markets, antiquarian book sellers, companies going out of business
- Collected actively until death in 2006

The Collection

- 20,000 rare books
- 9,500 sound recordings dating from 1900
- 1,700 film titles dating from 1916
- 350 film posters and playbills
- 75,000 photographs including linotypes, daguerreotypes, tintypes, and ferrotypes
- Manuscripts, records and ephemera

The Facility

Former Home

- Originally, paper collections housed in Clayton's converted garage
- Clayton provided access to researchers
- Became inadequate for access & preservation

Current Facility

- In 2006, agreement finalized with state, county, city governments to lease former courthouse
- Collection housed in 23,000 s.f. building

Community Partnerships

Partnerships

- Rich collections but need help preserving and providing access – currently focus is on programming
- *Corporations* – Sony, Cuadra Star
- *Universities* – Howard, Pepperdine, UCLA, USC
- *Cultural institutions* – Autry Center, Huntington, Skirball Cultural Center
- *Community organizations* – Links, Inc; Jackie Robinson Center; California African American Genealogical Society
- *Individuals*

Volunteers

- Recruited from presentations at civic groups, through bimonthly newsletter, word-of-mouth
- Include librarians, teachers, university students
- Unique opportunity to handle rare materials
- Copy catalog books
- Organize magazine collection
- Inventory and catalog films

Angel City Chapter of the Links, Inc.

- Volunteer service organization of women of color
- Members volunteer at MCLM
- Participate in annual service project with Links Achievers w/ MCLM

Links Achievers

- Mentoring program for college-bound male high school seniors
- Have previously done landscaping, painting projects at MCLM
- This year's project introduced them to some of the functions within archives and research libraries

Strategies for Community Building

- Creativity
- Word-of-mouth/networking
- In-kind support
- Process of building relationship is as important as product of relationship

Potential Outcomes of Community Building

- Creates a public with understanding of institution's mission and significance
- Gives community sense of ownership in institution
- Creates user base
- Establishes long-term supporters
 - Financial donors
 - Donors of collections
 - Public policy advocates

Concluding Thought

“At the Mayme A. Clayton Library & Museum the valuable lessons of history contained within the Collection serve as an agent of healing and friendship. The time has come to connect the dots and look for the similarities rather than the differences. The time has come to create community. We all need and deserve to feel whole, and to belong to something greater than ourselves.”

Avery Clayton