

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

A Guide to the Integrating Delmar Collection, 1962-2010

Summary Information

Repository

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

Creator

Miki Conn, Arlen Westbrook

Title

Integrating Delmar Collection, 1962-2010

Identifier

MG 260

Date

1962-2010

Physical Description

1 box; .42 linear feet

Physical Location

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

Language of the Material

English

Abstract

In 1957, Arlen Westbrook and her husband rented their home in Delmar, New York, to Dr. James Cunningham, his wife Margaret, and their two daughters. This commonplace event became an extraordinary one, as the Westbrooks had invited the first Black family to live in the white community.

Circumstances caused Arlen to need to remain in the home for several months, and over that time, she and Margaret became close friends, standing up to the racism they encountered from some community members. Unbeknownst to either woman, they each

kept a journal of the experience, which eventually became the basis for their co-authored book, *"Integrating Delmar: The Story of a Friendship."*

This collection contains clippings, correspondence, writings, and digital photographs.

Preferred Citation

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

Integrating Delmar Collection, 1962-2010, MG 260. Albany Institute of History & Art Library, Albany, New York.

Conditions Governing Access and Use

Restrictions on Access

None

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Accession: #LIB 2020.028

Accession Source/Date: Gift of Miki Conn and Arlen Westbrook, July 2020

Processing Information

Processed by H. Cox; completed October 2020.

Biographical/Historical

In 1957, Dr. James Cunningham (1918-2015), his wife Margaret (1919-2016), along with their daughters, Margaret "Miki" (1945-) and Fern (1949-2020), moved to the Albany area from Alaska, where James had worked at a tuberculosis hospital. Encountering

racism and discrimination, the family had difficulty finding someone to rent a home to them.

That same year, Arlen Westbrook (1928-) and her husband were preparing to spend a year in Amherst, Massachusetts, where he had accepted a temporary position at Amherst College. Planning to return to their home in Delmar, New York, afterwards, they decided to rent out their home instead of leaving it vacant.

A colleague of James' brought the two families together, and while both parties had some concerns, they decided to make it work, integrating Delmar in the process. They also integrated the home, as Arlen needed to remain for two months due to delays in her ability to move to Amherst to be with her husband. Margaret and Arlen became close friends during that time and faced the community pushback against the Cunningham's presence together. Unbeknownst to one another, each woman also kept a journal. Eventually both families moved on, but the friendship lasted for the rest of their lives.

Miki (Cunningham) Conn helped her mother, Margaret, and Arlen edit their journals into a cohesive book, which became *Integrating Delmar: The Story of a Friendship*.

Scope and Contents

The Integrative Delmar Collection consists of clippings, correspondence, and writings. The collection spans from 1962-2020, with the bulk of the records from the 2000s.

Clippings, 2008, includes a clipping on racism in housing.

Correspondence, 1962-2009, contains correspondence primarily between Margaret and Arlen, but also includes some with Miki as well as others.

Writings, 2007-2010, is comprised of drafts of the *Integrating Delmar* manuscript, unused additional material that was not included in the final book, an early outline of the book, and copies of Margaret Cunningham and Arlen Westbrooks' journals.

Photographs, undated, includes digital images of James, Margaret, Miki, and Fern Cunningham, as well as of Arlen Westbrook.

Contents List

The following section contains a listing of the materials in the collection.

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