

MSS. Collection #166

Child Care Centers (Greensboro) Collection, ca. 1943-1944. ½ box (14 folders), 121 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found. ½

INTRODUCTION

This collection contains materials relating to the federally-funded child care centers established in Greensboro during World War II. The majority of the collection consists of photographs of children, their instructors, and their activities on a typical day. Several articles provide context for the creation of the centers, while advertisements highlight their appeal to working mothers. Of particular note are a few photographs of child care centers for African-American children. Researchers interested in the lives of women and children on the home front during World War II may find this collection useful.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into three series and arranged within series by document type and/or subject. The series are: **Miscellaneous**, ca. 1943-1944; **Photographs**, ca. 1943-1944; and **Printed Materials**, ca. 1943-1944.

Provenance: This collection was donated by Mazie Atkinson in November 2002 and assigned the accession number 2002.116.1. The donor got the materials from a painter who found them in an attic.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by intern Grace Zayobi in June 2024.

HISTORICAL NOTE

As the country began to send troops overseas to fight in World War II, women were needed to fill jobs men had vacated and in essential wartime industries. However, many women were mothers who only had their older children, other relatives, maids, or neighbors to provide childcare, so employers had difficulty filling positions and a higher rate of absenteeism also hindered productivity. As a result, Congress allocated funds under the Lanham Act to support a national childcare program. In April 1943, Greensboro was allotted \$80,292, with that amount to be matched at 50% by donations and attendance fees. The administrative supervisor of the program was Ruth Steelman, the former principal of the David Caldwell School, who reported to School Superintendent Ben L. Smith since the centers were part of the Greensboro Public Schools. While the original funding was for a six month trial period, Steelman assured Greensboro officials that the program would extend into the school year, serving preschoolers as well as school-age students up to age 14. By 1944, Greensboro had 11 nursery schools and six

school-age units operating between 7 AM and 6 PM six days a week and charging \$1.80 per week.

Historical Sources: The sources used to compile this historical note include materials in the collection, particularly “While mothers work” (*North Carolina Education*, September 1943; 3:2) and “Women’s activities at work and play” (*The Greensboro Record*, July 1, 1944; 3:2), as well as “Child care units are boon to busy mothers” (*Greensboro Daily News*, July 25, 1943), a copy of which can be found in the folder at the front of the collection.

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

This types of materials in this collection include photographs, signs, advertisements, newspaper clippings, programs, and pamphlets that pertain to the child care centers in Greensboro during World War II. The majority of the collection consists of photographs showing the children, with a few that also include their instructors. While the centers served children up to age 14, most photographs feature nursery school students. The printed materials are all geared toward working mothers, with the bulk being advertisements encouraging mothers to take advantage of the services provided by child care centers while at work.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Miscellaneous. 3 folders (4 items). ca. 1943-1944.

This series contains two handmade posters promoting the Nursery School (1:2), which cared for children from two to six years old. Of particular note is a blank questionnaire for school-age children to gage whether they would enjoy going to a child care center during the summer (1:3). Also included is a letter sent by Ruth Steelman and Ben L. Smith to “Supervisors of War Time Child Care” with a questionnaire about the policies and practices of federally-funded child care centers (1:1), but the questionnaire itself is not present.

2. Photographs. 8 folders (106 items). ca. 1943-1944.

The photographs primarily feature child care units for younger children, showing students doing crafts, playing, napping, and eating under the watchful eyes of their teachers. The Greensboro Public Schools were segregated in the 1940s, so separate photographs show African-American students and their educators (2:2-3, 2:7-8). While few posed class photos are included (2:1), most are candid of activities during a typical day at a child care center. Many photographs exist in multiple copies and sizes, and some have stamps to indicate that they were taken for the U.S. Office of Education (2:5).

3. Printed Materials. 3 folders (11 items). ca. 1943-1944.

A highlight of this series are the advertisements (3:1), which encourage working mothers to send their children to child care centers and assure them that the children would be fed, educated,

and allowed playtime. Some also list the locations of the child care units. The articles address the challenges working mothers faced during World War II, with background and an overview of the child care program in Greensboro (3:2). Also contained in the series are a program relating to the J.C. Price nursery school that includes its objectives, as well as a pamphlet titled "A Guidebook for Parents of Beginning School Children." (3:3).

FOLDER LISTING

| <u>Series</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Contents</u> | |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------|--|
| 1 | 1 | Miscellaneous | -- Correspondence (1944) |
| | 2 | " | -- Signage (ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 3 | " | -- Questionnaire (ca. 1943-1944) |
| 2 | 1 | Photographs | -- Class Photos (ca. 1943) |
| | 2 | " | -- Instruction (ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 3 | " | -- Meals (ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 4 | " | -- Miscellaneous (ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 5 | " | -- Naptime (ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 6 | " | -- Playtime (indoors; ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 7 | " | -- Playtime (outdoors; ca. 1943-1944) |
| | 8 | " | -- WBIG (1944) |
| 3 | 1 | Printed Materials | -- Advertisements (ca. 1943) |
| | 2 | " | -- Newspaper and periodical articles (1943-1944) |
| | 3 | " | -- Programs and pamphlets (ca. 1943) |