

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society
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Archival and Manuscript Collections Finding Aid

ACCESSION NO.: HRHS-3

COLLECTION TITLE: Simms-Wilson Collection

DATES: c.1877-c.1929 **SIZE:** 1" (2 folders)

DONOR: Ellen C. Walker

PROCESSED: August 2003, Tracy Harter

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The collection consists of a roll book, two photographs, photocopies, a letter, and other papers of Lucy Simms. The "Roll Book," which originally belonged to U.G. Wilson, contains class rosters, essays, and class lessons and/or notes and also was used as a scrapbook of poetry and prose newspaper clippings. The photographs, showing Simms with various students, have been scanned and are available in that format in the HRHS photograph collection. Photocopied material includes biographical information about Lucy Simms. A letter, dated 17 May 1877, from the principal of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute inquires whether Lucy's brother, John, intends to pay her remaining school debt for the year. Other papers include forms and pages from school lessons and textbooks.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Lucy F. Simms

Lucy F. Simms was born a slave in 1855 on the Gray family estate "Hilltop" along the eastern edge of Harrisonburg. Miss Simms began teaching when she was 17 or 18 years old and was able to attend Hampton Institute from 1874-1877. Upon graduation, "Miss Lucy" returned to the Valley and taught for a year at Zenda, a black community north of Harrisonburg. She then began teaching in Harrisonburg city schools, first in a church room and later in the new Effinger School. She taught there until the end of the 1933-1934 school year and died on July 10, 1934.

Lucy Simms' career spanned 56 years. In her obituary, the Daily News-Record stated, "The record of the faithful colored teacher has few if any parallels in Virginia...She taught three generations in many of the Harrisonburg colored families and it is estimated that 1800 boys and girls were instructed by her." In 1938-1939, Harrisonburg built a school named in her honor.

U.G. Wilson

Born November 20, 1866, in Harrisonburg, Ulysses Grant Wilson was the son of Robert and Jane Simms Wilson and a half-brother of Lucy Simms. He began his teaching career in Mt. Crawford in 1882 and taught three sessions there. He then taught two sessions at Pleasant Valley and three at Bridgewater before joining the Harrisonburg school system, where he taught until 1915. He also was the choir director for John Wesley Methodist Church for 50 years.

Wilson published a volume of verse entitled *Mammy's Chillun and Other Poems*. In 1941, his poem, "The Seasons" was included in an anthology, *The Book of Modern Poetry*, published by Avon House in

New York City. He was also the author of the ballad, "The Old Big Spring," and a patriotic song, "Of Virginia Let Us Sing."

Wilson died on August 13, 1943, at Rockingham Memorial Hospital, in Harrisonburg

*Biographical Information courtesy of Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society webpage exhibit
"The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Experience: African American Education During Segregation," 2003, and Wilson's obituary in the August 14, 1943 edition of the Daily News-Record.*

COLLECTION INVENTORY:

Folder 1: "Roll Book" of U.G. Wilson, c.1880s

Folder 2:

Subfolder A: Photographs

1. Lucy Simms & 3 generations of pupils, n.d. (EW001)
2. Lucy Simms & Effinger School 1st and 2nd grade, c.1928 (EW002)

Subfolder B: Photocopied Material

1. Identification of Photo #2 above
2. [not for reproduction] Graduating class, 1877, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute
3. Introduction and page from publication of "Hampton Graduates, 1871-1899"
4. Photocopy of biographical article about Lucy Simms from unknown source, "A Remarkable Record", c. 1929.

Subfolder C: Letter

1. S.C. Armstrong to John Simms, 17 May 1877
2. Envelope

Subfolder D: Papers

1. Blank "Monthly Report" form (for submission to County Superintendent by Teacher.)
2. Page of schoolwork/lessons, algebra and contraction multiplication.
3. Pages from textbook, re mechanics/physics.