



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

James and Ethel Lucus papers,  
circa 1902-1990, bulk 1910-1960

Vuyana T. Cyrus

2011



Anacostia Community Museum Archives  
1901 Fort Place, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20020  
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<http://www.anacostia.si.edu/Collections/ArchiveCollection>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Anacostia Community Museum Archives
<b>Title:</b>	James and Ethel Lucus papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	ACMA.06-023
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1902-1990 (bulk 1919-1960)
<b>Extent:</b>	0.53 Linear feet (3 boxes)
<b>Creator:</b>	Lucus, Ethel Minns Lucus, James William
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Summary:</b>	The collection, which dates from circa 1902 to 1990 and measures .53 linear feet, documents the personal and professional lives of James William Lucus and Ethel Minns Lucus. The collection is comprised of photographs, correspondence, postcards, newspaper clippings, diplomas, awards, pamphlets, leaflets, programs, and vital statistics records.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

The James and Ethel Lucus papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 2004 by Meridith McCurtis and Hildred Lucus McCurtis.

### Preferred Citation

James and Ethel Lucus papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Meridith McCurtis and Hildred Lucus McCurtis.

### Conditions Governing Use

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: [ACMarchives@si.edu](mailto:ACMarchives@si.edu).

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## Biographical / Historical

James William Lucus was born in Abbeville, GA on 26 December 1895 to Jack and Hattie Dean Lucus. Despite the fact that both his father and mother worked - a railroad laborer and domestic servant, respectively --the family still struggled to maintain their simple existence. In one of his earliest recollections, Mr. Lucus describes his childhood home as, "...a one-room house of uncertain pedigree..." Yet the family persevered. In addition to her work as a domestic, his mother worked in the cotton and corn

fields during planting and harvest seasons. As for his father, if local railroad work became sparse, Jack Lucas travelled to other parts of the state to find work.

Given these circumstances it is not surprising that James did not enter school until fourth grade. Shortly after he was enrolled, he was withdrawn so that he could work with his father cutting wood for railroad ties. This action was taken at the behest of the family's doctor, who felt that James needed to build his strength and bulk. A few years later, a stronger and older James William Lucas re-entered fourth grade. However, he could only attend school in the spring because he had to work the rest of the year. It was at this time that his parents separated and, since his mother's income was not sufficient to support the household, James had to step in to fill the financial void left by his father. His early education came to a temporary halt in 1911, when he graduated from eighth grade at the age of fifteen.

After graduation, James spent a year earning income as a railroad worker and cotton-picker; and to some extent he accepted these occupations as his lot in life. That all changed when family friend Charlie Jefferson suggested that he and James move to Waycross, GA to find better employment opportunities. They left in the spring of 1912 and both found jobs immediately. Buoyed by this initial success, Mr. Jefferson encouraged James to attend trade school at Tuskegee Institute.

James Lucas entered Tuskegee in 1913 and, as it was with his early education, he worked while attending school. He performed various jobs around the school during the day and took classes at night. In 1915 he earned his high school academic diploma and in 1916 he earned his applied electricity diploma.

The skills he acquired at Tuskegee Institute enabled him to serve in the U.S. Army's C.O. Company "F" 317th Engineers during World War I. In June 1918 his unit was deployed to France for nine months. Their primary mission was to dig trenches and dugouts in the battle zones. His unit returned on 31 March 1919 and Mr. Lucas was honorably discharged on 18 April 1919.

Once he left the military in 1919 he moved to Chicago, IL, where he attended Lewis Institute. He earned a Bachelor of Science in 1923 and a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering in 1924. Unfortunately, his two degrees were not enough to secure an engineering job, so he decided to become a teacher. He completed his course work at the Chicago Normal School in 1925. The kid whose initial education experience was a sporadic four-year stint in a country grammar school would go on to have a 36-year teaching career with the Public Schools of Chicago.

A year after starting his employment as a teacher James Lucas married Ethel E. Minns, a dramatist. Mrs. Lucas was born in 1903. She studied theatre at the Chicago Conservatory from where she earned a diploma in 1935 and a Bachelor of Dramatic Art in 1940. Thereafter, she acted, danced, and sang her way through the Chicago arts scene. Later Mrs. Lucas established the E. M. L. Creative Theatre which presented performances in the Chicago area. The performances ranged from dramas to large scale musicals. The Theatre also offered a variety of classes for actors of all ages. Given her extensive involvement in Chicago's cultural life, she received awards and other recognition for her contributions.

James and Ethel Lucas remained married for sixty years. They had one child, Hildred, who followed in her father's footsteps, becoming a teacher with the Chicago Public Schools. Mr. Lucas died on 5 September 1986 as a result of injuries he sustained in two separated muggings. Mrs. Lucas died three years later in the early spring of 1990.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection, which dates from 1902 to 1990, documents the activities of James and Ethel Lucas. It contains material related to Mr. Lucas's education, military service, and his teaching career with the Public Schools of Chicago. Additionally, the collection documents Ethel Minns Lucas's education and her

involvement in various Chicago area theatrical activities. Included in the collection are awards, certificates, correspondence, diplomas, military records, and photographic prints.

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## Arrangement

The papers are organized into three series one of which has been further arranged into subseries. The contents of each series and subseries are arranged alphabetically. There are oversize materials in the Awards and Citations and Education subseries, as well as in the Photographs series. The series and subseries are arranged as follows:

Series I: Biographical

Subseries 1.1: Awards and Citations

Subseries 1.2: Education

Subseries 1.3: General Series II: Correspondence Series III: Photographs

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- African American actresses
- African American educators
- African American families
- African American soldiers
- African Americans -- Education
- African Americans -- Employment
- African Americans -- Social life and customs
- World War, 1914-1918 -- African Americans

Types of Materials:

- Awards
- Clippings
- Correspondence
- Diplomas
- Leaflets
- Marriage certificates
- Pamphlets
- Photographic prints
- Photographs
- Postcards
- Programs

Names:

- Lucus, Ethel Minns
- Lucus, James William

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical, 1902 - 1986

*0.13 Linear feet (This series contains autobiographical and biographical information related to the Lucas' commendations, education, and employment. Of particular interest is Mr. Lucas' autobiography, which details his early life.)*

#### 1.1: Awards and Citations

Box 1, Folder 1	Ethel M. Lucas, 1971, 1969, 1962
Box 1, Folder 2	James W. Lucas, 1985, 1974, 1915

#### 1.2: Education

Box 1, Folder 3	Chicago Conservatory, 1940, 1935
Box 1, Folder 4	Chicago Normal College, 26 June 1925
Box 1, Folder 5	Lewis Institute, 1919 - 1926
Box 1, Folder 6	Tuskegee Institute, 1914 - 1917 Oversize

#### 1.3: General

Box 1, Folder 7	Autobiography, James W. Lucas, 17 January 1982
Box 1, Folder 8	Employment and military service, circa 1918-1944
Box 1, Folder 9	Legal documents, circa 1902-1985
Box 1, Folder 10	Lincoln Cemetery, 1949, 1986, 1939
Box 1, Folder 11	Obituaries, 1986, 1962
Box 1, Folder 12	Printed material, circa 1915-1937
Map-case 1, Drawer 9	James W. Lucas, 1985, 1915, 1974
Map-case 1, Drawer 9	Chicago Normal College, 26 June 1925
Map-case 1, Drawer 9	Tuskegee Institute, 1914 - 1917

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## Series 2: Correspondence, 1906 - 1990

*0.02 Linear feet (This series contains personal correspondence between Mr. Lucas and his family and friends, and business correspondence related to Ethel Lucas's theatrical activities.)*

Box 1, Folder 13      Business correspondence, 1990, 1969, 1951, undated

Box 1, Folder 14      Personal correspondence, 1918 - 1919, 1906, circa 1940-1988

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## Series 3: Photographs, 1915 - 1971

*0.2 Linear feet (This series contains black and white photographs of the Lucas family's activities. Included is an oversize 1926 wedding portrait.)*

Box 2, Folder 1	E.M.L Creative Theatre Oversize
Box 2, Folder 2	Group portraits
Box 2, Folder 3	Lucus family portraits Oversize
Box 2, Folder 4	School and reunion Oversize
Box 2, Folder 5	Tributes
Box 3, Folder 1	E.M.L Creative Theatre Oversize
Box 3, Folder 2	Lucus family portraits Oversize
Box 3, Folder 3	School and reunion Oversize

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ACMA PH2004.7002.01: J.W. (James William) Lucas displaying fish, 1947  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Lucus family

The James and Ethel Lucas papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 2004 by Meridith McCurtis and Hildred Lucas McCurtis.

Topic: African American men  
Fishing

Genre/Form: Photographs

Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.04: Tuskegee Institute 40th anniversary reunion of 1915 class, 1955

*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Polk, P. H., 1898-

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Names: Tuskegee Institute



Topic: African Americans  
Class reunions

Place: Alabama

Genre/Form: Photographs

Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.05: J.W. (James Williams) Lucus and Ethel Minns Lucus pose with their wedding party, 1926  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 7 x 9 1/2 in. (17.8 x 24.1 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Woodard Studios

The James and Ethel Lucus papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 2004 by Meridith McCurtis and Hildred Lucus McCurtis.

Topic: African American  
Weddings

Place: Chicago (Ill.)

Genre/Form: Photographs  
Studio portraits

Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.06: Tuskegee Institute Class of 1915, 1915  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 11 x 13 in. (27.9 x 33 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Lucus family

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Names: Tuskegee Institute

Topic: African American

Place: Alabama

Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits

Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.07: Tuskegee Institute class of 1915: Booker T. Washington seated in second row, tenth from right, 1915  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Lucus family

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Names: Tuskegee Institute  
Washington, Booker T., 1856-1915

Topic: African American

Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits  
Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.08: Unidentified event: Tuskegee Institute, 1915  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Bedou, A. P. (Arthur P), 1882-1966

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Names: Tuskegee Institute  
Topic: African American  
Place: Alabama  
Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits  
Culture: African American

ACMA PH2004.7002.23a: Portrait of J.W. (James William) Lucas in Jussey, France during World War I, 1918  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 in. (14 x 8.9 cm))*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Lucus family

James William Lucas was born in Abbeville, GA on 26 December 1895 to Jack and Hattie Dean Lucas. James entered Tuskegee Institute in 1913 and earned his high school academic diploma in 1916 and his applied electricity diploma in 1916. The skills he acquired at Tuskegee enabled him to serve in the U.S. Army's C.O. Company "F" 317 Engineers during World War I. In June 1918 his unit was deployed to France for nine months. Their primary mission was to dig trenches and dugouts in the battle zones. His unit returned on 31 March 1919 and Mr. Lucas was honorably discharged on 18 April 1919.

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Topic: African American soldiers  
World War, 1914-1918  
Place: France  
Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits -- African American men  
Culture: African American

ACMA 2004.7002.61: Discharge Certificate for James William Lucas, World War I, 1918  
*1 Item*

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

United States. Army

James William Lucas was born in Abbeville, GA on 26 December 1895 to Jack and Hattie Dean Lucas. James entered Tuskegee Institute in 1913 and earned his high school academic diploma in 1916 and his applied electricity diploma in 1916. The skills he acquired at Tuskegee enabled him to serve in the U.S. Army's C.O. Company "F" 317 Engineers during World War I. In June 1918 his unit was deployed to France for nine months. Their primary mission was to dig trenches and dugouts in the battle zones. His unit returned on 31 March 1919 and Mr. Lucas was honorably discharged on 18 April 1919.

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Ink on paper.

Topic: African American soldiers  
World War, 1914-1918

Genre/Form: Certificates

Culture: African American

ACMA 2004.7002.62: Enlistment Record for James William Lucas, World War I,  
1918 March 16

*1 Item*

[Image\(s\)](#)[Image\(s\)](#)

United States. Army

James William Lucas was born in Abbeville, GA on 26 December 1895 to Jack and Hattie Dean Lucas. James entered Tuskegee Institute in 1913 and earned his high school academic diploma in 1916 and his applied electricity diploma in 1916. The skills he acquired at Tuskegee enabled him to serve in the U.S. Army's C.O. Company "F" 317 Engineers during World War I. In June 1918 his unit was deployed to France for nine months. Their primary mission was to dig trenches and dugouts in the battle zones. His unit returned on 31 March 1919 and Mr. Lucas was honorably discharged on 18 April 1919.

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Ink on paper.

Honorable Discharge certificate located on verso of enlistment record.

Topic: African American soldiers  
World War, 1914-1918

Genre/Form: Certificates

Culture: African American

ACMA 2004.7002.45: Graduation portrait of J. W.(James William) Lucas, circa  
1915

*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 5 1/2 x 3 5/8 inches)*

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Names: Tuskegee Institute  
Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits -- African American men  
Culture: African American

ACMA 2004.7002.45: Group of soldiers in France during World War I, circa 1918  
*1 Item (photographic print ; gelatin silver; 5 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches)*

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Topic: World War, 1914-1918  
Place: France  
Genre/Form: Photographs  
Portraits -- African American men  
Culture: African American