



Smithsonian Institution Archives

## Ella B. Howard Pearis Oral History Interview, 1986

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Smithsonian Institution Archives  
Washington, D.C.  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <a href="mailto:osiaref@si.edu">osiaref@si.edu</a>
<b>Title:</b>	Ella B. Howard Pearis Oral History Interview
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9540
<b>Date:</b>	1986
<b>Extent:</b>	1 audiotape (Reference copy). 2 digital .wmv files and .rm files (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	Pearis, Ella B. Howard., interviewee
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9540, Ella B. Howard Pearis Oral History Interview

### Access Restriction

Restricted. Contact [SIHistory@si.edu](mailto:SIHistory@si.edu) to request permission.

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## Historical Note

Ella B. Howard Pearis is a fourth generation resident of Anacostia in Washington, D.C. She comes from a family of community activists, and, through her own involvement in organizations such as the Southeast Service Center of the American Red Cross, has carried on that tradition. Pearis is a founding member of the Anacostia Historical Society, a group which has worked closely with the Smithsonian's Neighborhood Museum.

Begun as the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in 1967, an experimental bureau of the Smithsonian Institution, ANM was the first community-based institution founded under the aegis of a major institution and became the prototype for other small neighborhood museums. It was developed as part of a broader plan to encourage museum access to a diverse cultural and socioeconomic group of museum goers. As a community-based museum, ANM sought to address issues of importance to its local constituency, as reflected in early exhibits. With the expansion of its mission, the museum's research and exhibits programs came to reflect its commitment to African American history and culture. In 2006, it was renamed the Anacostia Community Museum to reflect its role as a model community museum.

## Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Pearis was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of her affiliation with the Anacostia Historical Society and Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.

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## Descriptive Entry

Pearis was interviewed in 1986 by Sabine K. Lovett of the University of Maryland as part of a class project. This interview covers her childhood, education, and career in Washington, D.C., and her work with the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and Anacostia Historical Society.

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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 Americans -- History
- African Americans -- Washington (D.C.)
- Interviews
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Anacostia Historical Society
- Anacostia Museum
- Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
- Lovett, Sabine K. interviewer
- Pearis, Ella B. Howard
- United States. Bureau of Engraving and Printing

## Container Listing

### Interviews

Interviews

#### **Interview 1: December 4, 1986**

Interviews

Covers Pearis' family background and experiences in Anacostia, c. 1863-1986, including: her great-grandparents' arrival in Anacostia in 1863; construction of the Howard family house in 1876 with financial assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau; St. Elizabeth's Hospital as a source of jobs after the Civil War; Mount Zion School as a center of African American education; her grandfather's community activism, especially his role in bringing electricity to Anacostia; her grandfather's founding of the first African American church in Anacostia; her education at Dunbar High School and Miner Teachers College; the importance of education in the Anacostia community; her involvement in the community, such as her efforts to obtain better sewage, transportation, and schools; absence of crime in Anacostia in the old days; her daycare for neighborhood children; her childhood in aunt's home following her mother's death; her fifteen year career at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and early retirement on disability; her volunteer work at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, including discussion of museum as a valuable community resource; rural nature of Anacostia when community was first established; reaction to the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum when it first opened; founding and activities of the Anacostia Historical Society and her limited involvement with the organization now due to illness; her work as volunteer for the Red Cross; impact of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum's exhibit *The Anacostia Story* on the local community.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-22, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 cassette audiotape
- Preservation Masters: 3 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotape, 2 digital .mp3 files