



Guide to the Martha and Paul D. Simpson Papers, 1948-1952

This collection guide was produced in .

This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

103 Perkins Library, Duke University

Durham 27708-0185

919-660-5822

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Table of Contents

Summary	3
Background	4
Administrative Information	4
Names and Subjects	5
Collection Inventory	5
Martha and Paul D. Simpson papers	5

Summary

Collection Title:

Martha and Paul D. Simpson papers, 1948-1952

Creator:

Simpson, Martha Eleanor Booker

Abstract:

This collection contains the correspondence of Martha Eleanor Booker and her future husband Paul David Simpson from 1948-1952 and relates their struggles in school and as a couple during this time. Both were African-Americans from Virginia.

Extent:

1.2 Linear Feet

Physical Location:

For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

Language:

English

Language:

Materials in English. Several letters in a variation of Pig Latin with an iz-infix and one with a portion written in code (key included).

Collection ID:

RL.10187

Permalink:

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/simpsonmartha/>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Martha and Paul D. Simpson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Background

Scope and Content

The correspondence between Martha and Paul D. Simpson, an African American couple from Virginia, spans their time spent earning teaching degrees (1948-1952) and details not only their personal lives, but also discusses work, religion, race, and their education. The couple eventually married. The letters document daily life, their relationship, and their struggles in school, life and on the job market. Paul sometimes refers to Martha as "Booker" or "Cherie." Martha often calls Paul "Button."

Biographical/Historical

The letters of Martha Eleanor Booker Simpson (1928-2010) and Paul David Simpson (1918-2010) cover their years spent in college (1948-1952). Martha attended Elizabeth City Teachers College, Winston-Salem Teachers College, and Warren County Training School, while Paul attended Virginia State College and went on to work for Phenix High School while Martha completed her education.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

103 Perkins Library, Duke University

Durham 27708-0185

919-660-5822

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection.

All or portions of this collection may be housed off-site in Duke University's Library Service Center. The library may require up to 48-hours to retrieve these materials for research use.

Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library to use this collection.

Acquisition Information

The Martha and Paul D. Simpson Papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in June, 2014.

Processing Information

Processed by: Janice Hansen, December 2014.

Accessions described in this finding aid: 2014-0111

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Names and Subjects

- Love-letters
- African American college students
- Courtship -- United States -- 20th century
- African Americans -- Segregation -- History -- 20th century
- African Americans -- Education (Higher)
- African American teachers -- Correspondence
- Simpson, Paul David
- Simpson, Martha Eleanor Booker
- Virginia State College

Collection Inventory

Martha and Paul D. Simpson papers, 1948-1952

Correspondence, 1948

Box 1

Scope and Contents

The correspondence between Martha Booker and Paul Simpson begins in May of 1948 with a letter from Martha expressing her love for Paul and

hoping she can show "both of you" (presumably Paul and his son, Paul Jr.) this love soon. This portion of the correspondence contains only Martha's letters to Paul and details her daily life, her job search, gifts purchased for Paul Jr., her experience as the only "colored person present" at Mass, and her love for Paul.

Correspondence, 1949

Box 1

Scope and Contents

This portion of the correspondence contains only letters from Martha to Paul and runs from September to December of 1949. The letters detail her dorm life, church activities, and student life while attending Elizabeth City Teachers College. They discuss her plans to come home and hopefully visit Paul.

Correspondence, 1950

Box 1

Physical Description: 4 folders

Scope and Contents

This portion of the correspondence covers the entirety of 1950 and includes letters from both Martha and Paul. Martha details her life at school and her interest in another man should Paul choose not to want her anymore. Her letters are very critical of herself, her looks, and her thoughts and feelings. Paul's letters describe the student life at Virginia State College, his feelings, his financial support of Martha, his coursework in physics, and his photography. Their correspondence from March mentions the book "Two Flappers in Paris," which Martha describes as "the story of love-making [] put in plain every day English" that had been passed around the dorm for new techniques and what she has learned about their own sexual relationship from it. Paul asks to borrow it so he can glean from it as well. Martha also mentions an affair Paul had with Edith and her feelings about that. Paul writes about a trip to Washington for the meeting of the American Physical Society and how he and his professor were the "only Negroes there and there were no other persons of color present with the exception of one Japanese individual." In July, Martha attends summer school at the Winston-Salem Teachers College, before returning to Elizabeth City in the fall. In a letter dated October 17th, Martha details a new program for the colleges of North Carolina and mentions that it is meant to raise the standards of all colleges, to compete scholastically with any school, "negro or white." Paul responds by explaining this is due to not wanting integrated colleges, so "the Negro schools must be better than they were." Martha also notes a "short-lived" pregnancy in November.

Correspondence, 1951

Box 2

Physical Description: 3 folders

Scope and Contents

The correspondence from 1951 contains letters from both Martha and Paul, and further details their academic endeavors, Paul's desire to finally get divorced and marry Martha, their sex life, a brief mention of Paul Jr., Paul's job search after his graduation and new job teaching at Phenix High School in Hampton, Virginia, and Martha's time at Warren County Training School in Wise, North Carolina.

Correspondence, 1952

Box 2

Physical Description: 2 folders

Scope and Contents

The 1952 correspondence between Martha and Paul covers their feelings about their engagement and their plans for marriage in May of that year, the final months of Martha's schooling, and dreams for the future (a room together, then an apartment and maybe a house).

Undated Correspondence, undated

Box 2

Scope and Contents

Various undated correspondence between Paul and Martha. One lengthy letter notes her love for education and Paul, as well as her job search in Washington D.C., where she was asked for sexual favors in exchange for help obtaining a government job.

Other Correspondence, 1949-1952

Box 2

Scope and Contents

Miscellaneous letters to Paul Simpson from February 1949-February 1952, including a letter and math assignment from his son.

Ephemera, 1951 and undated

Box 2

Scope and Contents

Includes Paul's graduation announcement with a personal note to Martha, a nude photograph of Martha, a lock of her hair, and several other miscellaneous documents.

Empty Envelopes

Box 2

[Return to Table of Contents](#)