

MARGARET WALKER CENTER
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY



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Margaret Walker

Margaret Walker Personal Papers
Digital Archives Project

www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/digital

PRESS KIT



Robert Lockett, PhD
Jackson State University
Assistant Professor of History and
Director, Margaret Walker Center
www.jsums.edu/margaretwalker
601-979-3935
601-979-5929 (fax)

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CONTACT: Robert Lockett PhD, Director, (601) 979-3935, robert.lockett@jsums.edu

Digital archive of Margaret Walker's journals, from 1930s to 1990s, now complete with aid of Ford Foundation grant

Jackson, MS—The Margaret Walker Center recently launched its Digital Archives Project, www.jsums.edu/margaretwalker/digital, thanks to a \$100,000 grant from the Ford Foundation.

The extensive work of scanning and digitizing over 130 of Margaret Walker's personal journals—dating from the 1930s to the 1990s, and encompassing more than 10,000 hand-written pages—is part of a three-year project initiated by the Center's former director, Dr. Alferdteen Harrison.

Twenty-seven staff members, graduate assistants, and grant consultants were enlisted to aid the monumental effort.

Margaret Walker's academic and artistic legacies as a scholar, author, teacher, and activist are unparalleled. With her renowned poem, "For My People" and the neo-slave narrative *Jubilee*, (based on memories of her maternal grandmother), Walker was a tangible and vital link between the diverse artists of the Harlem Renaissance and modern black writers such as Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and James Baldwin.

At Jackson State University, Margaret Walker was a long-time faculty member in the English Department, and, in 1968, she founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People—a museum and archive at JSU, that today bears her name: The Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African-American Experience.

One of the single largest collections of a modern, black female writer anywhere in the world, Walker's literary, administrative, and personal papers are the capstone of the Center's manuscript collections. Thanks to another major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which will run through June 2012, approximately 50% of Walker's personal papers will be digitized and posted online for access by scholars, educators, students, and all people interested in the life and times of Margaret Walker.

For more information, contact Dr. Robert Lockett, Director of the Margaret Walker Center, at robert.lockett@jsums.edu or 601-979-2055.

About the Margaret Walker Center for the African American Experience: Both an archive and museum, the Margaret Walker Center <http://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalker/> is dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of African-American history and culture.

MARGARET WALKER ALEXANDER AND THE STUDY OF THE 20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN

By Angela Stewart and Robert Luckett

As a professor of English at Jackson State University (JSU) in 1968, Margaret Walker Alexander founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People. Inspired “to write the songs of her people” from a diverse group of authors ranging from Phillis Wheatley, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and William Blake to William Faulkner and the prophets of Hebrew scripture, Alexander was an already accomplished essayist, poet, and novelist. At the forefront of a nascent Black Studies movement, Alexander had had the unique opportunity both to be mentored by the likes of W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Sterling A. Brown and to be a mentor to writers such as Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, Haki Madhubuti, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Sonia Sanchez. Thus, the Institute and its mission reflected her complete immersion in 20th Century African-American history and culture.

Born in Birmingham on July 7, 1915, Margaret Abigail Walker was the daughter of a Methodist minister and an educator and musician. Sigismund Walker and Marion Dozier Walker had high expectations for their four children and encouraged each of them to fulfill his or her individual potential. By the time she was five years old, Margaret was reading and writing, and, at age fourteen, she started a journal, which she kept for the rest of her life. Recognizing her gifts, her parents supported her studies, and, one day, her father gave her a datebook and challenged her to write some piece of creative writing every day for a calendar year—a task into which Margaret threw herself.

Leaving Alabama, the family moved to New Orleans in 1925. Once settled, Margaret attended Gilbert Academy, where she was an honor student and where her writing flourished. She published an essay, “What Is to Become of Us?,” and also penned her first national piece, a poem entitled “I Want to Write,” which appeared in the NAACP’s official organ, the *Crisis*, in 1934. Her talent led her to New Orleans University (now Dillard University). There, she met the famous poet, Langston Hughes, who nurtured her love of literature but encouraged her to leave the South to complete her education. She promptly enrolled at her father’s alma mater, Northwestern University, and received her bachelor’s degree in English in 1935.

After her graduation, Margaret Walker stayed in Chicago and worked with the Federal Writers’ Project. That gave her the chance to meet authors such as Richard Wright, Sterling A. Brown, Horace Cayton, Gwendolyn Brooks, Frank Yerby, and others. She developed a close friendship with Richard Wright and joined his Southside Writers Group, eventually taking over as group leader when Wright moved to New York City. Her tumultuous relationship with him led to a biography, *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius*, in 1988.

In a 1937 issue of *Poetry* magazine, Walker published her seminal work, “For My People,” and her former Federal Writers’ Project boss, Sterling A. Brown, anthologized the poem in his important work, *The Negro Caravan*. After she left Chicago in 1939, she entered graduate school at the State University of Iowa’s competitive and highly respected Writers’ Workshop. For her master’s thesis, she refined “For My People” and published it in her first book of poetry by the same name in 1942. For that book, she became the first African-American woman to receive the Yale University Younger Poets Award.

One year after her book of poetry was released, Walker married Firnist James Alexander in North Carolina, where she was teaching at Livingstone College. By 1949, she and her husband had moved their three children to Mississippi, so she could join the faculty of Jackson College (now Jackson State University). Using her married name of Alexander, she taught English, composition, creative writing, African-American literature, and Bible as literature on the Language Arts faculty. Whenever possible, she brought writers to the campus such as Arna Bontemps, Owen Dodson, Robert Hayden, and Langston Hughes to discuss and recite poetry.

While at JSU, Alexander returned to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and completed her doctoral dissertation, a neo-slave narrative inspired by the memories of her maternal grandmother, Elvira Ware Dozier. Published under her maiden name and penname “Margaret Walker” in 1966, *Jubilee* represented thirty years of research and reflection. Never since out of print, *Jubilee* won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Award in 1968, and has been translated into Dutch, French, German, Japanese, as well as several other languages.

Upon her return, Dr. Alexander developed and coordinated the first humanities program at JSU, but her lasting achievement was the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People. As director of the Institute, she organized several conferences that were the first of their kind, including the 1971 National Evaluative Conference on Black Studies. The event brought renowned scholars, actors, activists, and public officials to the JSU campus to analyze this new field of scholarship. In 1973, she invited leading African-American women writers such as Margaret Burroughs, Lucille Clifton, Mari Evans, Paula Giddings, Nikki Giovanni, and Alice Walker to celebrate Phillis Wheatley’s bicentennial. She even spearheaded a conference to discuss the status of newly independent African countries and the problem of apartheid in South Africa.

After thirty years of teaching, Alexander retired as Professor Emerita of English and donated her literary and administrative papers to the Institute that she had founded and that was named in her honor: the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center for the Study of the 20th Century African American. The Alexander Papers at JSU include that well-worn datebook given to her by her father with 365 creative writing pieces in it as well as more than 130 of her personal journals dating from the 1930s to the 1990s. There are also a few unpublished works such as her epic poem, *Jean Lafitte*; novels, *Goose Island* and *Mother Beulah*; and numerous essays. In all, the Alexander Papers constitute the single largest collection of a modern black, female writer anywhere in the world.

Both an archive and a museum today, the Alexander Center is dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of the 20th Century African-American experience. The Center seeks to honor Alexander's artistic and academic legacy by expanding and promoting its manuscript holdings and oral history collections, interpreting African-American history and culture through its museum and exhibits, coordinating public programs on campus and throughout the community, preserving historic structures central to the African-American experience, and advocating Black Studies at JSU.

Over the course of the 2010 academic year, the Alexander Center has hosted the likes of Ellis Marsalis and Andrew Young for events and co-sponsored a student conference on campus: the *4th Annual Creative Arts Festival: The Sit-in Movement and Student Activism Fifty Years Later*. The Center's staff is also engaged in two major grants from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. These grants will result in the digitization of approximately 50% of the Alexander Papers, greatly expanding the reach and impact of the collection through its website: www.jsums.edu/margaretwalker.

Open to the public in historic Ayer Hall, the Alexander Center houses more than thirty significant manuscript collections like the papers of the former U.S. Secretary of Education, Roderick Paige, and a large oral history repository that includes the official collection of the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. The Center continues to assemble living memories, archival records, and personal papers for scholarly use and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with other organizations, such as its partners at JSU: the Fannie Lou Hamer National Institute on Citizenship and Democracy, the Afro-Cuban Research Institute, and the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement.

With six honorary degrees and numerous honors for her writings, Margaret Walker Alexander was inducted into the African-American Literary Hall of Fame at the Gwendolyn Brooks Writers' Conference at Chicago State University in 1998. One month later, on November 30, she succumbed to a long bout with breast cancer at the age of 83 in her daughter's Chicago home. She was survived by four children, nine grandchildren, and other descendants but also by a legacy that lives on through her poetry and other works as well as an Institute that she had founded thirty years earlier at JSU.

This article appeared in an abbreviated version in the Summer 2010 issue of *The Southern Register*.

AUTHORS

Angela Stewart serves as the Archivist of the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center for the Study of the 20th Century African American at Jackson State University. She may be reached at angela.d.2jsums.edu. Robert Luckett is an Assistant Professor of History and Director of the Alexander Center. He may be reached at robert.luckett@jsums.edu

MARGARET WALKER

personal papers digital archives



About the Project

The Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives Project is an effort to digitize approximately 50% of Walker's literary, administrative, and personal papers, which are the centerpieces of the Margaret Walker Center's manuscript collections.

Funded by the Ford Foundation, the first stage of this project included twenty-three staff members and grant consultants. It resulted in the scanning and uploading of more than 130 of Margaret Walker's personal journals, dating from the 1930s to the 1990s and totaling more than 10,000 handwritten pages. Those journals constitute just 10% of the Margaret Walker Personal Papers.

About Margaret Walker

At Jackson State University, Margaret Walker was a long-time faculty member in the English Department, and, in 1968, she founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People — a museum and archive at JSU that today bears her name: the Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African-American Experience. The Center seeks to honor her academic and artistic legacy through its archival collections, exhibits, and public programs.

The Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives project opens the door to the treasures of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, fostering the research and teachings of scholars specializing in English Literature, African-American Studies, the American South, American Democracy, cultural pluralism and other related disciplines.

Digitized journals can be accessed online at:
margaretwalker.jsums.edu



This project was made possible with funding from the Ford Foundation and National Endowment for the Humanities



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Physical Address:

Margaret Walker Center
Jackson State University
1400 John R. Lynch Street
Ayer Hall
Jackson, MS 39217

Mailing Address:

Margaret Walker Center
Jackson State University
P.O. Box 17008
Jackson, MS 39217

The Margaret Walker Center is an archive and museum dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of African-American history and culture. The mission of the Margaret Walker Center is to expand and promote its manuscript holdings and oral history collections, interpret African-American history and culture through its museum and exhibits, coordinate public programs on campus and throughout the community, preserve historic structures central to the African-American experience, and advocate Black Studies at JSU.

Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives Project Resources and Links to Margaret Walker on the Web

MARGARET WALKER CENTER:

<http://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/>

The Margaret Walker Center is an archive and museum dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of African-American history and culture.

MARGARET WALKER DIGITAL ARCHIVES PROJECT:

<http://margaretwalker.jsums.edu>

Welcome to the Margaret Walker Center's Digital Archives Project—an initiative made possible in part through major grants from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

MARGARET WALKER BIOGRAPHY ON POETRY FOUNDATION:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/margaret-walker>

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience.

MISSISSIPPI WRITERS PAGE:

<http://www.mswritersandmusicians.com/writers/margaret-walker.html>

Many twentieth-century writers were born in Mississippi or have spent an important part of their lives in the state. Some of these Mississippi writers are world famous while others are up-and-coming authors. All have contributed to the literary and cultural heritage of Mississippi. This website was originally researched by the students of Starkville High School in Starkville, Mississippi.

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY:

<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng384/walker.htm>

A website of links to Margaret Walker's poems maintained at Virginia Commonwealth University.

CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL:

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0035&s=For%20My%20People>

California Newsreel produces and distributes cutting edge, social justice films that inspire, educate and engage audiences. Founded in 1968, Newsreel is the oldest non-profit, social issue documentary film center in the country, the first to marry media production and contemporary social movements.

Books by Walker:

For My People (1942, poetry)

Jubilee (1966, novel)

How I Wrote Jubilee (1972)

Prophets for a New Day (1970, poetry)

October Journey (1973, poetry)

Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius (1988, biography)

This Is My Century: New and Collected Poems (1989, poetry)

On Being Female, Black, and Free: Essays by Margaret Walker, 1932-1992 (1997, essays)

Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives Project Public Service Announcements

Margaret Walker Center located on the campus of Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi invites you to experience a Digital Archive containing Walker's literary, administrative, and personal journals, which she kept from the 1930's until the 1990's. Digitized journals can be accessed by pointing your a website browser to margaretwalker.jsums.edu.

:10

Experience the life of Harlem Renaissance-era writer Margaret Walker. For more information visit margaretwalker.jsums.edu.

: 20

A scholar, author, teacher, and activist: Margaret Walker was a tangible connection between the diverse group of artists comprising the Harlem Renaissance and modern black writers such as Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and James Baldwin. For more information, visit margaretwalker.jsums.edu.

:30

A long-time faculty member of the JSU English Department, in 1968, Margaret Walker founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People--today a museum and archive bears her name: the Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African-American Experience. As an online resource for students and educators, the Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives offers in-depth insight into the life and times of Margaret Walker. For more information, visit margaretwalker.jsums.edu.

Media Contact:

Robert Lockett, PhD., Director
Margaret Walker Center:
Jackson State University
PO Box 17008
Jackson, MS 39217

Email: robert.lockett@jsums.edu



Margaret Walker

www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/digital

Margaret Walker's academic and artistic legacies as a scholar, author, teacher, and activist are unparalleled, and her literary, administrative, and personal papers represent the cornerstone of the Margaret Walker Center's manuscript collections. Further, they encompass one of the single largest personal archives of a modern, black female writer anywhere in the world. Approximately 50% of Walker's papers are being digitized and posted online for scholars, educators, students, and all endeavoring to gain invaluable insight into the life and times of Margaret Walker.

**Margaret Walker Personal Papers
Digital Archives Project**

March 5, 1941
I have been seriously debating the
advisability of continuing work on the
mother Brecht novel in the face
of world conditions. Simultaneously my
mind has been cooking up
another plot especially in these last
few weeks and days and it
begins to loom up with more
significance just now than the
religious story.
Frankly I am somewhat
shaky about attempting a difficult
piece of prose but at the same time
I feel compelled to write some prose
now. I have had my prose criticized
by experts during the past two and
a half years, in 1939 and in 1940
and I know something about my
own business technically.
True enough, also, I have a
wealth of material and experience
about Negro life in America out

Photograph courtesy of the Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University.

Journal 19. In this journal, Margaret Walker writes primarily about her experiences looking for a teaching job after recently receiving her MA in English from the University of Iowa.

About the Digital Collection

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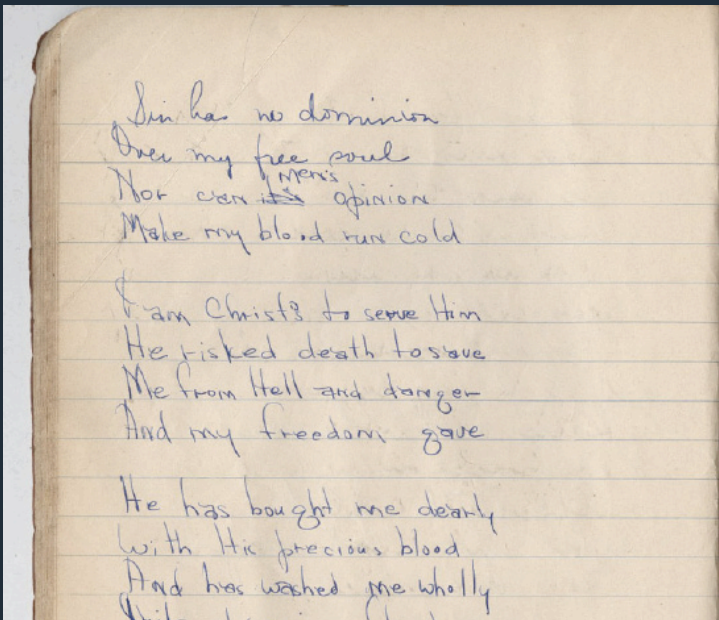
Benefit to Educators

Integrating technology is key to augmenting twenty-first century classrooms. For educators looking for guidance in how best to use the digital resources from the online Personal Papers archive in their classrooms, the Margaret Walker Center website located at www.jsu.edu/margaretwalkercenter/collections/digital-archives-project/for-teachers/ includes lesson plans, reading and writing prompts, suggestions on how to best use primary sources in a secondary classroom, and a discussion board. Two current high school teachers, Vija L. Lee of Jackson and Maurine Philpot of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, developed these tools.

Benefit to Researchers

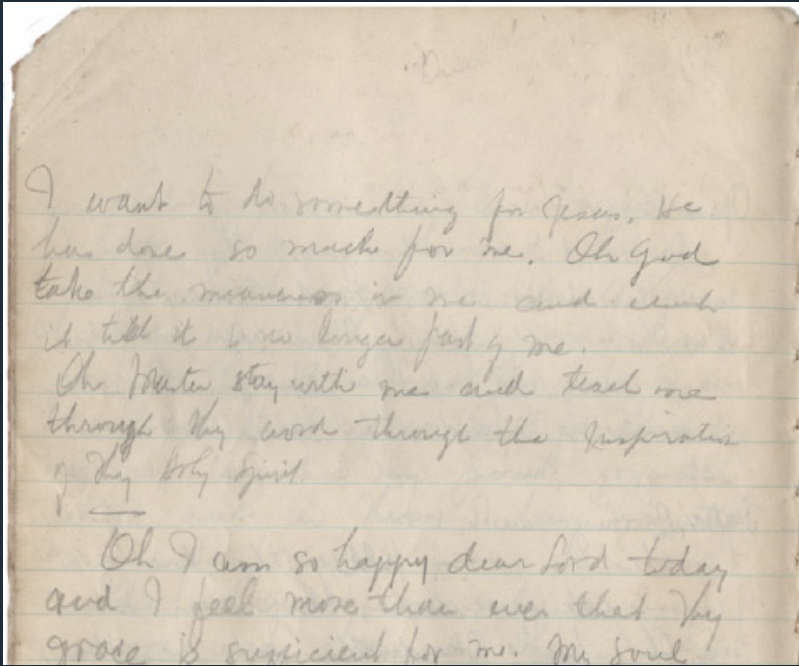
At the heart of the Margaret Walker Center's mission is the preservation of materials related to the history and culture of African Americans. Margaret Walker's Personal Papers represent her academic and artistic legacies as a scholar, author, teacher, and activist. With classic works such as her poem "For My People" and the neo-slave narrative *Jubilee*, based on the memories of her maternal grandmother, Walker was a tangible connection between the diverse group of artists who comprised the Harlem Renaissance and modern black writers such as Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and James Baldwin.

At Jackson State University (JSU), Margaret Walker was a long-time faculty member in the English Department, and, in 1968, she founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People—a museum and archive at JSU that today bears her name: the Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African-American Experience.



Photograph courtesy of the Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University.

Journal 5: Written from January to July 1935 and March to July 1936. Margaret reflects upon her life as a teen and looks to her future. This journal is a collection of Margaret's poetry and other poetry Margaret has collected over time.



Photograph courtesy of the Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University.

Journal 3: Written in 1934. Walker writes about praying, peace of mind, forgiveness, mercy, devotion to God, patience, grace, strength and gratitude for having God in her life. She also covers preparing for Communion Sunday, wanting God's guidance and protection, being hungry and passionate about God, and recalling childhood memories and poetry.

Project Components

Scanning Equipment

The Center purchased three Epson Expression 10,000XL flat-bed scanners, an Epson Perfection V700 Photo flat-bed scanner, four 1 terabyte external hard drives, a high-end multimedia computer, and three Dell Latitude laptop computers. The equipment was used to scan the digitized journals. MWC staff used Adobe Photoshop image editing software to create high resolution preservation and web accessible digital files.

Digitization & Storage

Angela D. Stewart, MA, the Margaret Walker Center archivist, spearheaded the work on the Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives Project. She was responsible for training all personnel in archival standards and the use of CONTENTdm, including consultants and graduate assistants who worked on the grant.

On a daily basis, Stewart oversaw the scanning and uploading of dig-

ital images and metadata related to Margaret Walker's journals and managed the workloads of the graduate assistants who worked on the project.

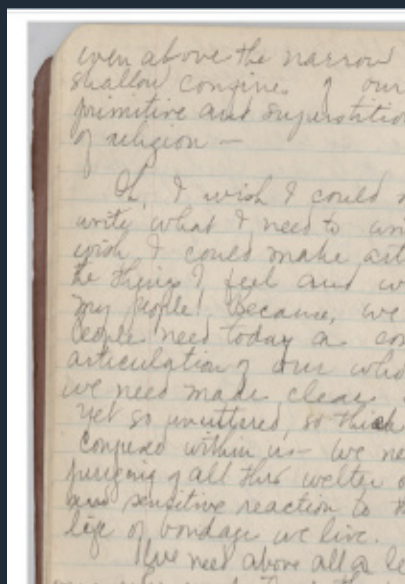
Working in collaboration, Dr. Alisa Mosley, Director of Jackson State University's Center for University Scholars, provided funding for ten graduate assistants. Umesh Reddy Remata and the JSU Office of Computing and Communications provided technical support for the scanning and uploading of materials to the storage server and for the creation of the Digital Archives Project website. KLV-Webwork consulted on the design of the website.

Phase Two

Thanks to a federal grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the second stage of the Personal Papers project will allow the Margaret Walker Center to digitize another 40% of Margaret Walker's collection, making half of her papers available online to the public.

Collection Management and Access

Digitized journals are managed by Margaret Walker Center staff using CONTENTdm—digital collection management software. Educators, students, and the general public may access the journals online using a website browser such as Firefox. The digital collection is maintained on a server that is housed on the campus of Jackson State University. Users may search all the contents of the journals in the CONTENTdm database.



Photograph courtesy of the Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University.

Journal 16: Written in 1939. Walker writes about what she will do with her life, goals she wants to achieve, time to stand on her own, World War II, Karl Marx, the need to write for the "Negro," and personal hardships.

Sunday morning Dick came over with
Ward. And the four of us went to
breakfast. I couldn't eat anything
and Dick remarked that I'd have to
learn to eat more. Together the
two of us caught the subway
and went to the Congress - He
went to the Fiction ^{Con} session and I went
to the folkloric session. He came
in the folkloric session before it
was over. I liked this session
much. Aunt Molly Jackson's
songs - I saw Lomas - Of the Sinner
folk - and those marvellous excerpts

Photograph courtesy of the Margaret Walker Center, Jackson State University.

Journal 15: Written in 1939. Walker recalls travelling to New York, meeting Ralph Ellison, being friends with Langston Hughes, and developing a relationship with Richard Wright.

Implications

This project opens the door to the treasures of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, fostering the research and teaching of scholars specializing in English Literature, African-American Studies, the American South, American Democracy, cultural pluralism and other related disciplines. By increasing national and international access to the Margaret Walker Personal Papers and the archives of the Margaret Walker Center, the digital collection will promote research and scholarship on the African-American experience.

Evaluation & Assessment

The Margaret Walker Center will evaluate the impact of the project using at least four means: 1). Measuring the amount of traffic on the Digital Archives Project website and on CONTENTdm; 2). Tracking the number of scholarly references to the online collection of the Margaret Walker Personal Papers in peer-reviewed articles and books; 3). Using an online evaluation form that can be submitted for feedback; 4). And monitoring the online discussion board for feedback and suggestions.

The Margaret Walker Personal Papers Digital Archives Project was made possible by grants from Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Margaret Walker Center
Jackson State University
P.O. Box 17008
Jackson, MS 39217

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Jackson State University
PO Box 17008
Jackson, MS 39217

