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Article: The Jessie Fuller Scrapbook: Balancing Access and Context in the Treatment of an Important Black Sorority Scrapbook from 1949 with a Unique but Damaging Structure

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## The Jessie Fuller Scrapbook: Balancing Access and Context in the Treatment of an Important Black Sorority Scrapbook from 1949 with a Unique but Damaging Structure

*This article issues from a presentation given from Charlottesville, Virginia, on the ancestral land and waters of the Monacan Nation. The authors extend their respect and gratitude to the Monacan Nation elders and hope the reader will have a chance to look at their website (<https://www.monacannation.com>) to understand more about their culture and community. In addition, the authors work on the Grounds of the University of Virginia (UVA), which was built upon and thrived off of the labor of enslaved workers. Please consult <https://slavery.virginia.edu/> to read more about the history of slavery and enslaved workers at UVA. Black and indigenous lives and the lives of people of color matter, and it is the authors' hope that this presentation contributes to that.*

### BACKGROUND

#### *Scrapbook Creator*

The Jessie Fuller scrapbook was created between 1946 and 1949 by a young woman attending Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), a historically Black college in Hampton, Virginia. The scrapbook has significant teaching and research value for several disciplines, including African American history, women's studies, the history of education, Virginia history, and photography. However, the scrapbook's multimedia materials affixed with failing adhesives present obstacles to its use.

Jessie Fuller was born in Chicago in 1926 (fig. 1). Her parents, S.B. and Lorena Fuller, were born in Louisiana but settled in Chicago in the 1920s. They were part of the Great Migration, a shift in population when about 6 million African Americans left the South for better work and educational opportunities available in northern cities. Fuller's father, S.B. Fuller, had grown up in poverty, quitting school after sixth grade to earn money for

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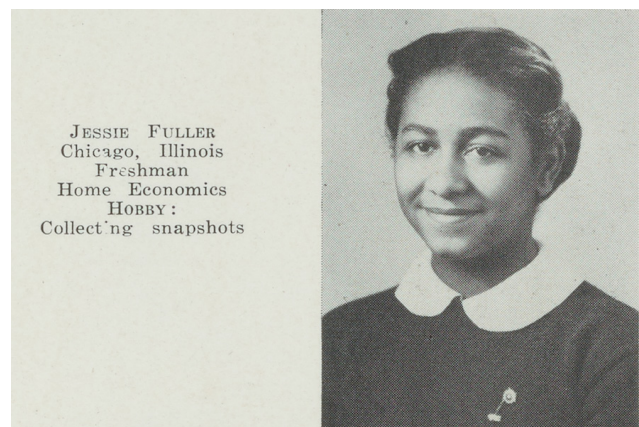


Fig. 1. Jessie Fuller, Phyllis Wheatley Annual, 1945–1946. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

his family. After moving to Chicago, he started his own business, selling soap and cosmetics door to door. By 1950, he had grown this business into a successful multi-million-dollar cosmetics company, with more than 3,000 sales agents in 38 states (Narvaez 1988; *Jet Magazine* 1988, 16).

By the time Fuller matriculated at Hampton, her family was well able to fund her attendance at such a prestigious institution (note 1). At Hampton, Fuller plunged herself into a variety of social activities. She pledged and was accepted into Alpha Kappa Alpha, the oldest national historically African American sorority. She was also a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Literary Society, a Hampton women's club that held literary events, as well as hosted dances, sports, and parties. Over the course of her undergraduate years, Fuller held several leadership roles in the Phyllis Wheatley Society, including as the treasurer and basketball team manager (fig. 2).

The scrapbook's photographs, invitations, cards, and other mementos support study into various research topics,





Fig. 2. Homecoming. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

including the Black women's club movement, Black sororal societies, amateur photography, and mid-century college life (fig. 3). As a result, the scrapbook illuminates a facet of African American history beyond slavery or the Civil Rights Movement. Jessie Fuller is not an activist but an ordinary middle-class Black woman experiencing joy with her friends and creating social bonds that would last a lifetime.

Of course, Fuller would have been aware of the racist violence and discrimination rampant in the United States, even in the North. She was born 7 years after the terroristic events of Chicago's Red Summer that began when a white man killed a Black swimmer who had crossed an invisible racial segregation line on the beach in 1919. Over the course of a

week, 38 people were killed, most of them Black, and more than 1,000 people lost their homes. Much of the violence was centered in Bronzeville, a predominantly Black Chicago neighborhood, which the U.S. Census lists as the Fuller residence in 1940 (Jones 2019). Although some years had passed since the devastating attacks, the emotional and physical scars on her neighborhood and neighbors were likely still present in Fuller's lifetime. This may explain why Jessie and her older sister Mary attended Hampton instead of going to one of the dozens of colleges in Chicago or other northern locations. Her family likely found it appealing to send their daughters to an institution with a goal of helping Black students thrive socially and academically.

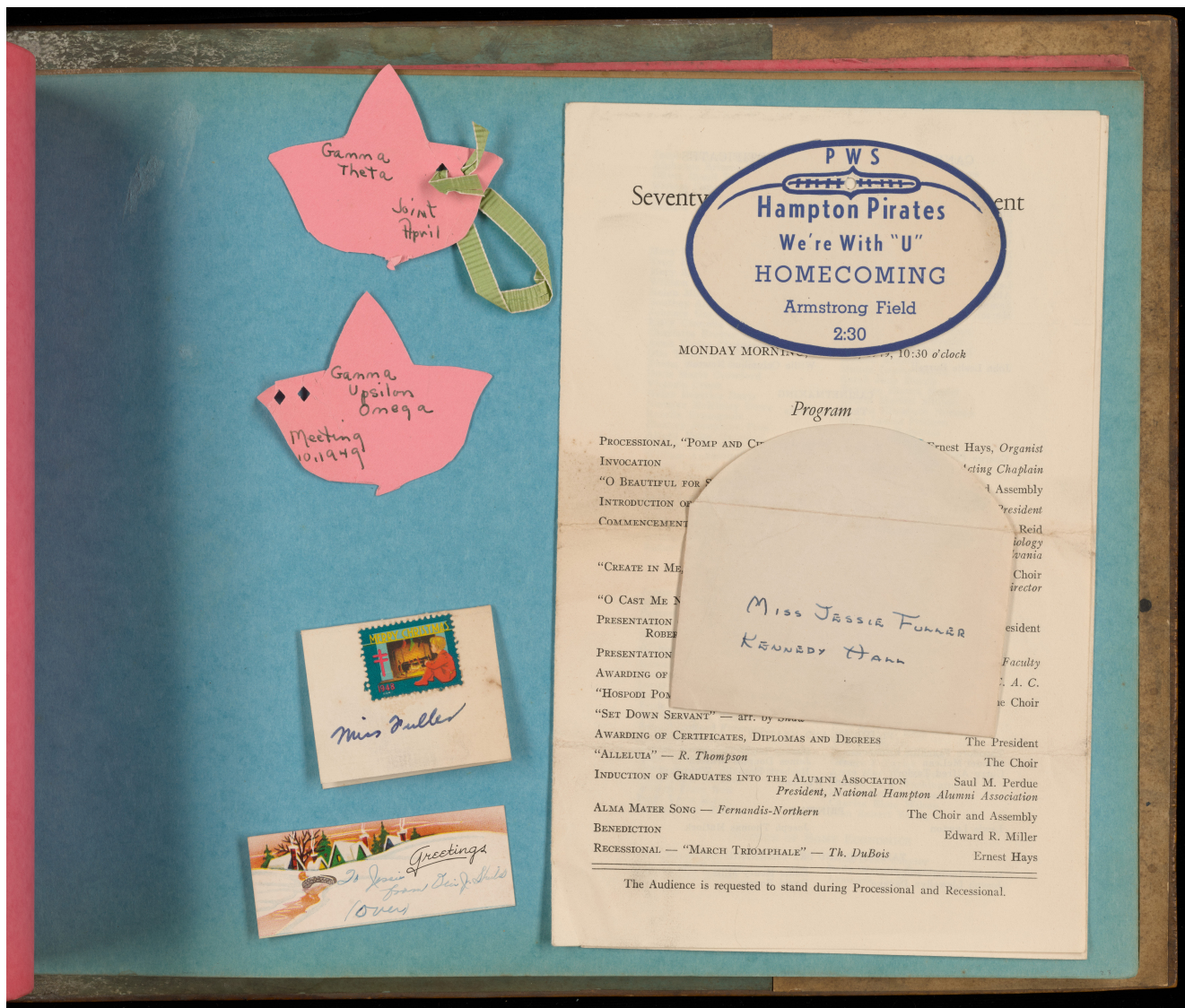


Fig. 3. Hampton Pirates event. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

After Fuller graduated with a degree in home economics, she returned to Chicago, where she married businessman William J. Spraggins. Due to her family’s financial and social status, she likely did not work from home after her marriage. However, she appeared periodically in the society pages of Black newspapers in their reporting of middle-class women’s social engagements and charity work.

#### INSTRUCTION CHALLENGES

Despite the Fuller scrapbook’s potential, it is not used as extensively for teaching and research as it could be. Scrapbooks in archival repositories have often been ignored in teaching and

research due to their fragility, as well as to the lack of cohesion in their content.

The Fuller scrapbook is an engaging item for teaching because students respond well to items that document their historical age group. Although fascinated by the content, novice student researchers have often been reluctant to handle the Fuller scrapbook due to features inherent to its materiality such as failing adhesives, hard-to-turn sheets of construction paper, mixed media, and loose slips of paper. Instruction Librarian Krystal Appiah would want them to wear gloves when turning pages where photographs were present because it was not possible to flip certain pages without touching a photograph. However, she would not want



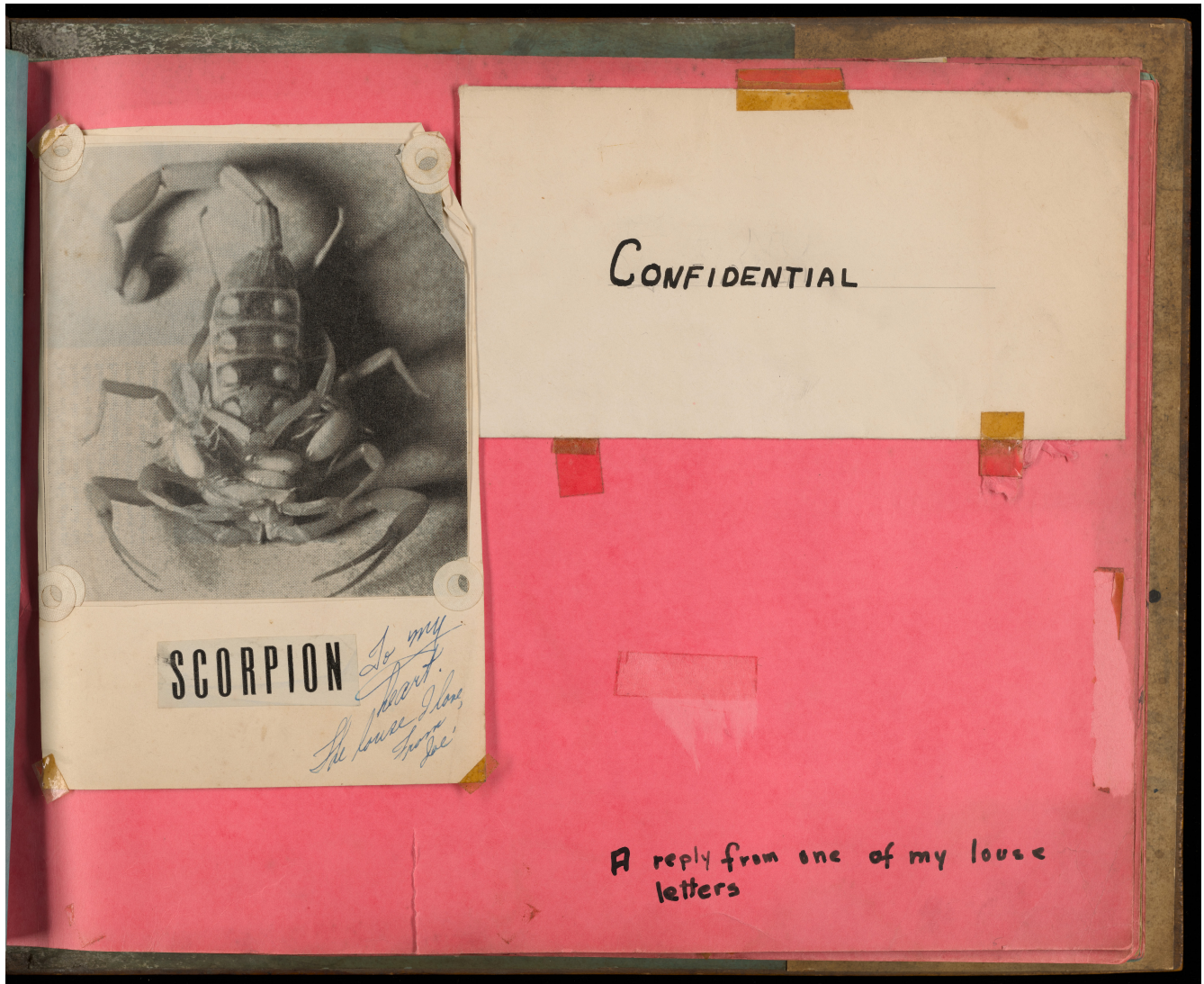


Fig. 4. Page with missing item. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

them to wear gloves when turning pages without photographs because users need the manual dexterity of bare hands to turn 70-year-old construction paper safely. It was also hard to view the album's contents considering that so many items were detached and loose (fig. 4). The unusual post binding also makes it difficult to turn pages and hold them open. Krystal would sometimes turn pages for students, but that mediation interfered with her methods for immersive, active learning.

Furthermore, the scrapbook format can stymie interpretation. Bibliography scholar Jesse Erickson (2020) acknowledges that scrapbooks are “elaborate and convoluted artifacts that defy straightforward analysis” and “have been treated with intellectual derision or downright contempt.” However, in the past 10 to 15 years, scholars have increasingly appreciated

the genre of scrapbooking as a valid source and have worked to develop methodologies to interpret them.

This is particularly important in the case of people from marginalized backgrounds where there is often a dearth of traditional archival sources by and about them in mainstream libraries and archives. Literary scholar Ellen Gruber Garvey (2012, p. 227) notes that “scrapbooks are a democratic form of archives . . . Writing with scissors and cheap newspapers allowed many who did not write books or diaries to record something about their thinking.” Garvey and Erickson are among a growing cohort of scholars and librarians who are “seeking to realize [scrapbooks’] pedagogical potential” (Erickson 2020).

However, Garvey (2012) cautions that “preservation [of scrapbooks] in a larger brick-and-mortar archive has been



less democratically distributed” (p. 227). Even if they make it into the archives, scrapbooks, even those created by individuals from marginalized groups, may not be prioritized for preservation. However, their value to research and teaching helps make the case for libraries to devote resources to preserving and digitizing scrapbooks. This was the case at UVA, where Krystal flagged the scrapbook for preservation review by Sue Donovan, conservator for Special Collections, due to its potential for classroom use.

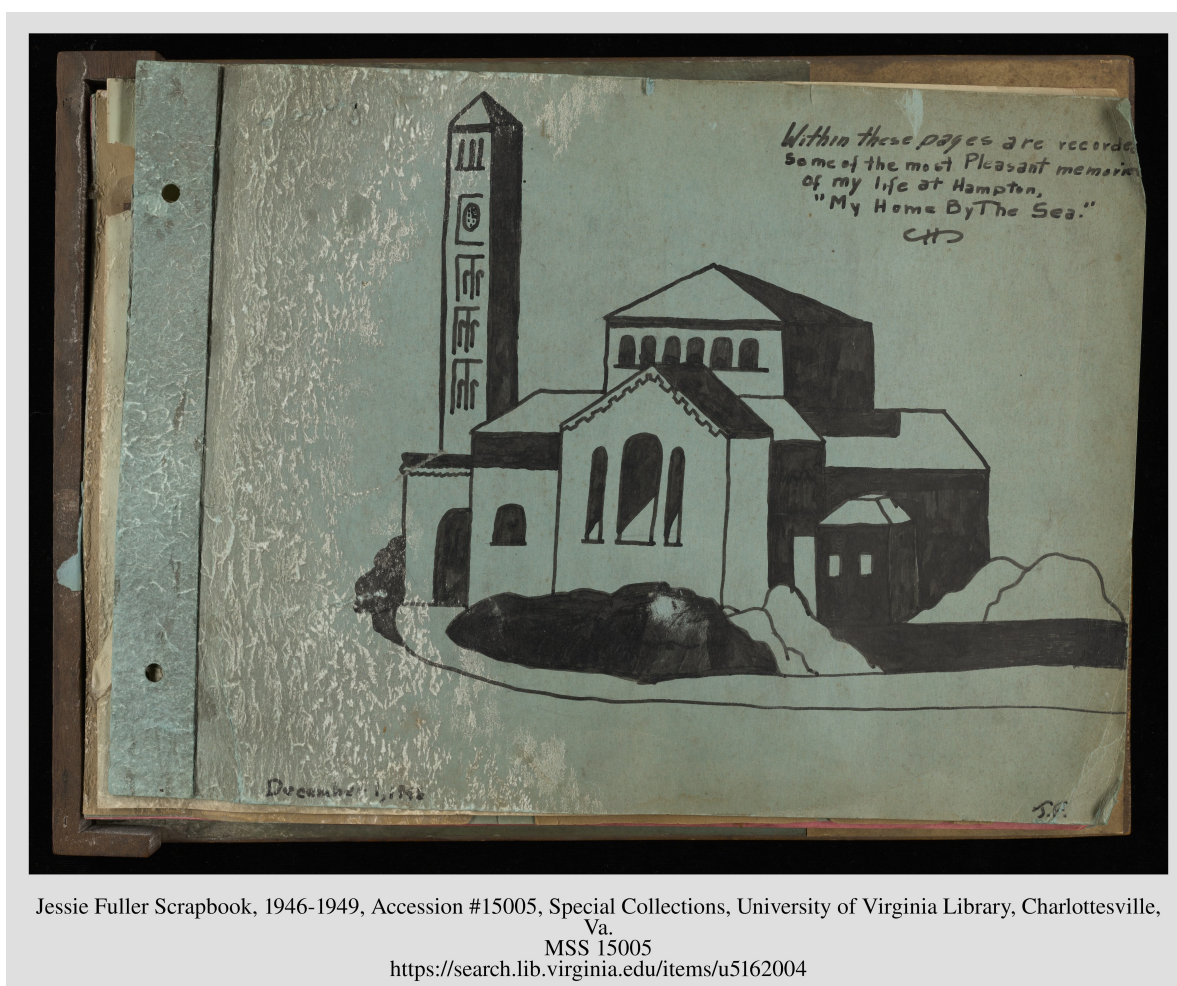
#### DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION OF THE SCRAPBOOK

Krystal first brought the scrapbook to Sue’s attention in mid-2018 with concerns about its condition. The scrapbook has a wooden lower board with a bracket-shaped wooden spine piece that is half an inch thick nailed to the left side of

the board. This lower board functions like a cradle for the pages that rest on top. Blue, pink, and tan calendared pages of almost card-like thickness are attached together and held onto the wooden board via two iron machining screws that pass through the back board and are secured with square iron nuts. There is no extant front board, and the first paper page is reinforced along the margin and decorated with an image of Hampton’s Memorial Church, indicating that this page functioned as the front cover (fig. 5).

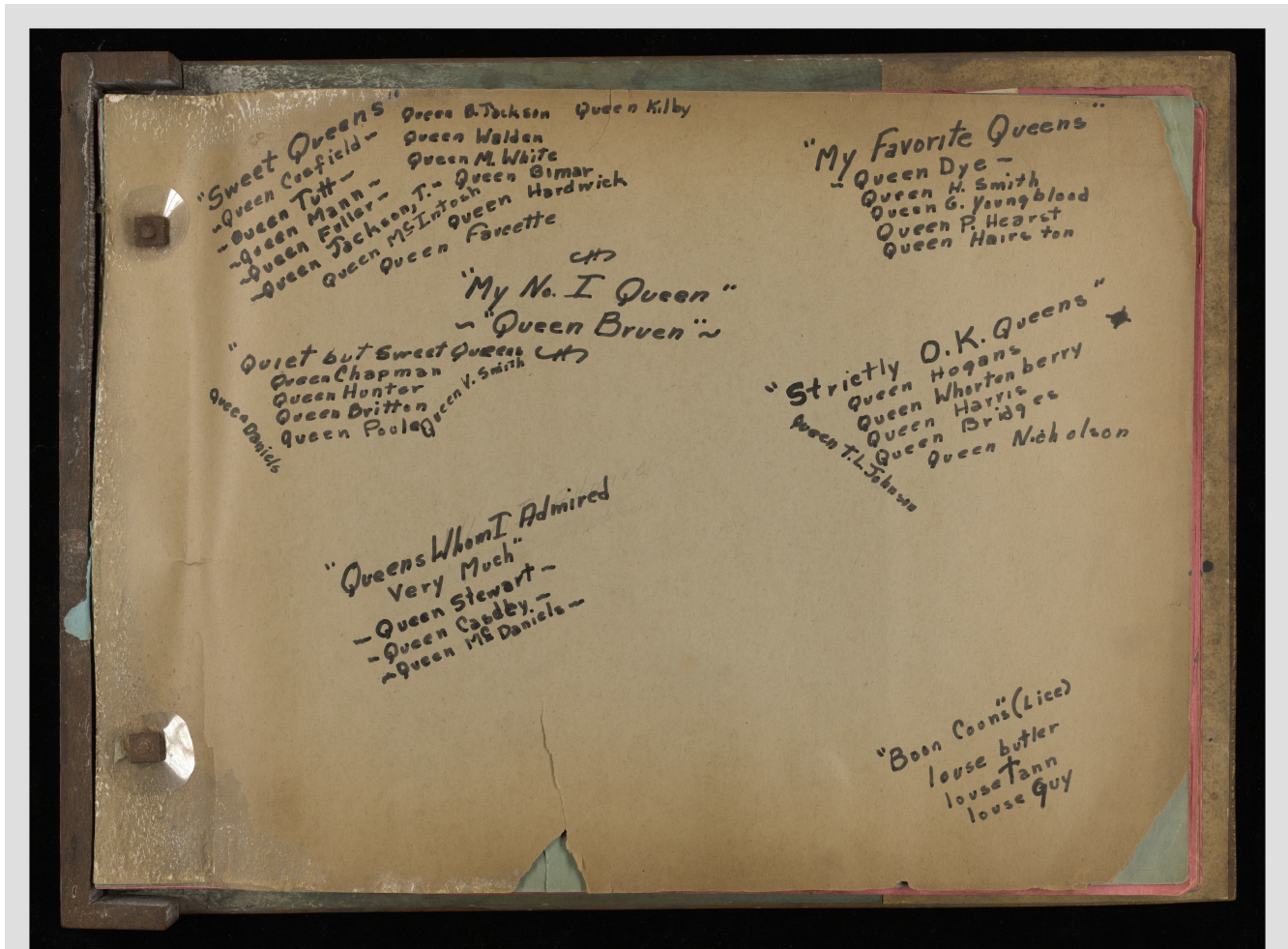
The first few dozen pages are heavy with memorabilia of Fuller’s rich social life at Hampton, including photographs, playbills, an annual, dance cards, and even wax candles. These are attached with different types and sizes of pressure sensitive tape from 1946 to 1949. After the first 23 pages, the memorabilia were inserted loose into the scrapbook.

The first two pages were detached, having torn at the holes punched for the iron screws. The structure itself



Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946-1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.  
MSS 15005  
<https://search.lib.virginia.edu/items/u5162004>

Fig. 5. Before treatment, upper cover of the scrapbook, showing detaching pages and tight screws. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946-1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.



Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946-1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.  
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Fig. 6. Before treatment, third leaf of the scrapbook, showing detaching pages and mechanical damage to the paper. Circles of silicone-release Mylar were added underneath the rusted nuts when they were loosened to permit better scanning. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946-1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

was damaging: the iron nuts were screwed tightly onto the paper, creating a breaking edge in the machine-made, short-grain paper between the condensed tight spine and the expanded thickness of the text block where the memorabilia was attached (fig. 6). The iron screws and the nuts were rusted, although this did not seem to be damaging the surrounding paper. The adhesive from the tape inside the scrapbook was yellowed and clearly differed in makeup from one page to another, with some areas still showing signs of tackiness. There had also been adhesive creep or a retraction of the tape carrier over the years, with the adhesive mass exposed beyond the edge of the carrier. Sections of tape had been accidentally pulled up over the years,

resulting in skinning of the paper surface around taped memorabilia and a loss of some content.

Nevertheless, the overall condition of the pages was surprisingly good, especially for scrapbooks. The damage on the first few pages seemed to be a result of repeated use combined with stiff paper, leaving the rest of the calendared pages that had received less handling still glossy and strong.

#### CONSERVATION OF THE SCRAPBOOK

##### *Main Concerns and Approach to Treatment*

Krystal's main concern was the ability of the item to be used and paged through as a scrapbook. In its current condition,



only the first few pages could be viewed since Krystal and her students were worried about causing further damage when turning the pages. Wax birthday candles taped to one of the pages were revealed during scanning because the condition of the scrapbook had previously obscured them from view. The primary problem was clearly the screw-post structure that put too much pressure on the spine edge of a stuffed scrapbook. The tape was perceived as another problem since it could cause more damage if left alone, and the parts that were already torn away left memorabilia at risk of loss or further damage.

Since the original structure was damaging, with screws that were too short to allow for the spine edge of the text block to appropriately expand to accommodate the thickness of the added memorabilia, there was not an obvious way at first to replicate the structure. Complicating this determination was the fact that the wooden board structure was quite unique. Patent research on Google patents, thanks to UVA librarians, did not reveal evidence that this scrapbook style had been a commercially-available item, meaning the scrapbook could have been made by hand in the carpentry shop at Hampton. It was thus very important for the text block to fit back onto the lower board.

At first, Gary Frost's method of reconsolidating the thick plates of failed 19th-century adhesive bindings seemed like it could be a solution for the thick construction paper pages of the Fuller scrapbook. This method involves attaching Japanese paper guards to each spine edge, leaving a quarter-inch of feathered edge that extends past the paper spine. The feathered edges are then consolidated together with PVA, forming a flexible and strong spine when dry. The resulting text block would rest in the cradle of the wooden board so

that students could see how the scrapbook had once been assembled. Neither Krystal nor Molly Schwartzburg, the curator for 20th-century materials, or Sue were entirely thrilled with this solution. However, at the time, it appeared to be a good compromise between access and respecting the original structure.

The secondary issue for the scrapbook's condition was the tape removal. It was important to remove the tape carrier and the adhesive mass to prevent further damage, but Krystal and Molly did not feel strongly about removing the tape stains. Furthermore, it became apparent while drawing up the proposal and during treatment that the tape functioned as evidence of how Jessie Fuller interacted with the scrapbook and how she curated her memories. In the end, all involved agreed that removing the staining would not be part of the treatment, especially after solvent testing on the adhesive proved that stain removal would be difficult and time intensive on the thick, colored paper.

After the initial assessment and treatment proposal, for which the rusted nuts were loosened with a bit of microcrystalline wax and then moved as high up the screw shaft as possible to relieve pressure on the paper, the scrapbook was fully digitized by UVA Library's Digital Production Group. The scans entered the UVA Digital Library so that the images can be seen in the scrapbook's online record (note 2). Upon its return to the lab, the tape carrier and adhesive were removed using a hot air pen and a Casselli spatula. The tape stains aided in realigning the memorabilia into the position that Jessie Fuller had chosen, and pasting detached items back in place with toned tengucho maintained the scrapbook's appearance (fig. 7).



Fig. 7. One page of the scrapbook, showing deteriorated pressure-sensitive tape, before treatment on the left and after treatment on the right. Lightweight, toned tengucho was used to reattach the memorabilia after tape removal. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

### *Change in Approach*

At this point, there was a long period when treatment on the scrapbook had to be abandoned. Sue's maternity leave, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and then projects with pressing deadlines such as the salvage of a time capsule, delayed progress on the Jessie Fuller scrapbook. It was not until December 2020 that tape removal and mending were finished, and it was time to think about reassembling the scrapbook. By this point, more than a year had passed since work had begun, and after dedicating more than 20 treatment hours, the Japanese paper guard method no longer seemed like the right approach. Replicating the screw-post structure without replicating the damage now seemed like a better method. After spending about 30 minutes in the fasteners aisle of the local hardware store one day, a machining screw of the same diameter and an additional half inch of length was located.

After finding this replacement screw, Krystal, Molly, and Sue conferred over Zoom about the progress with the scrapbook, and Sue proposed replicating the original structure. The instruction and curatorial staff both agreed wholeheartedly with the change, thrilled that there was a way to replicate the structure without perpetuating the damage it had caused. With the new machining screws, the depth of the text block could be expanded while still using the same attachment method. Molly suggested that reusing the original square nuts would further maintain the original impression and impact of the scrapbook. Adding spacers of different thicknesses would bulk up the spine to allow for tightening without putting pressure on the paper, and the rust from the nuts would not damage the original paper (fig. 8). In this way, the scrapbook would retain some of its pre-treatment qualities without significant changes to the structure.

Of course, the treatment did change aspects of the physical appearance. The machining screws had a Phillips head groove instead of a flathead groove, so the screw heads look different on the lower cover. More visible is the spacer on the upper cover that protects the paper underneath from any potential rust and appropriately secures the text block.

Krystal felt that the visibility of the spacers actually serves as a reminder to those using the scrapbook that it is an item that has been treated and needs to be handled with care. The scrapbook opens well, and all pages that have attached memorabilia can be viewed, although some pages do need more support, so Permalife interleaving pages were added to stabilize floppy memorabilia or protect photographs while turning pages (fig. 9).

### *Takeaways from Treatment*

Working on the scrapbook was certainly a learning experience in a lot of ways. As with every tape removal project, there is often a recurring theme of "I wish I had known then what I know now." Primarily, using a higher heat setting from the beginning would have helped avoid using solvents that created blue tide lines on greeting card papers with optical brighteners. Sue would also have avoided using the hot air pencil on the page with the candles, since applying heat to work on the verso, even with protective layers of board covering the candle, caused the wax in one candle to melt slightly.

The preceding complications notwithstanding, this treatment ended up even better than anticipated, with less intervention on the structure. Key to the success of this treatment was the open communication and collaboration among Krystal, Molly, and Sue. Feedback from Krystal and Molly about using the scrapbook and what would be best for students and researchers, as well as frank conversations about the amount of time tape removal can take and the limits of what could be done with such thick paper, allowed for a satisfying outcome for all and set the bar for productive discussions in the future. And although there were significant delays in the treatment, this ultimately led to a change that was more respectful of the nature of the item. Furthermore, the revised treatment means that there is the option to revisit treatment in the future, since the screws can be removed and the pages lifted off. Individual pages could even be put on exhibition, which would be a wonderful way to share the joy and friendship that Jessie Fuller documented in her scrapbook.

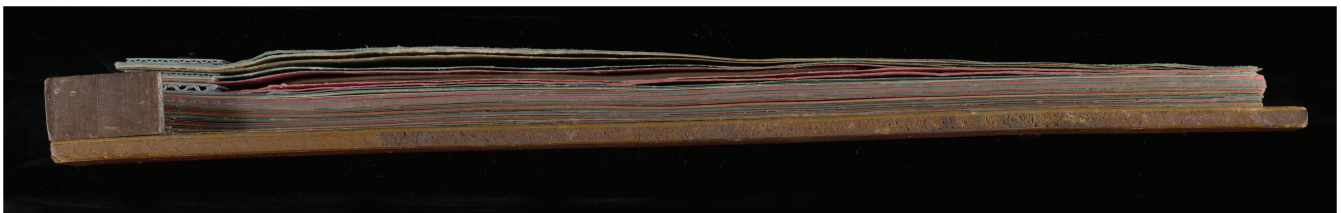


Fig. 8. After treatment, the thickness of the scrapbook increased past the wooden spine bracket, but with the added support of the spacers at the spine, the pages are safely secured. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.





Fig. 9. After treatment, view of the upper board of the scrapbook, showing the visible blue board spacer at the spine edge. Jessie Fuller Scrapbook, 1946–1949, Accession #15005, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

#### REPARATIVE ACQUISITIONS AND CONSERVATION

With its insights into mid-century Black life, the scrapbook also supports the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library's goal of acquiring and highlighting materials by historically marginalized groups. UVA was founded in 1826 and remained largely segregated by race and sex until 1970. As a result, Small's collections, as well as the University Archives, overwhelmingly represent the experiences of white people, ranging from items that exclude the lives and personhood of Black people to those that document active hostility and disparagement of African Americans. The library has few materials by or about African Americans that are not related to the violence of slavery or Jim Crow. Thus, it is challenging for Black students and community members to find meaningful materials about their histories and experiences in Small's collections. In presenting the joyful life of a Black college student, the Fuller

scrapbook is one of the few items that presents an alternative to those traumatic histories.

Acquiring this scrapbook represents a first step toward showing our students, staff, and community that we cherish them, and conserving and preserving it is another stride in this direction. Along with exhibitions, research, or instruction-driven conservation requests, preserving and conserving items in Small's collections that uplift Black, Brown, and indigenous experiences is one of Sue's highest priorities. It was truly an honor to have Jessie Fuller's scrapbook in the lab, to be able to share space with the joy and fellowship that her memories evoke. And although the predominantly white collections in the library and archives mean that items like Fuller's scrapbook are rare, this means that it is even more important to be actively working to expand access to the lives of people who have been historically marginalized. It is not enough to wait for others to identify items to work on from exhibitions and research queues. Sue is going into

the stacks and asking the advice of staff members who know these collections by heart to put her labor and time into treating collections that show the experiences and lives of Black school teachers, students, and citizens of Charlottesville and the surrounding area, as well as those of enslaved workers. Treating the Jessie Fuller scrapbook is a wonderful example of conservation working with Special Collections staff to identify a creative strategy that balances providing context and expanding access to the unique voice of Jessie Fuller.

#### NOTES

1. Hampton is a historically Black college (or HBCU) that was founded in 1868 as Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute to educate African Americans after the Civil War and during the era of legal segregation in the South. Hampton's notable alumni include Booker T. Washington and Mary Jackson, one of the mathematicians depicted in the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*.
2. The scrapbook record and images before treatment can be accessed using the following link: [https://search.lib.virginia.edu/sources/uva\\_library/items/u5162004](https://search.lib.virginia.edu/sources/uva_library/items/u5162004).

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