

Hunter-Gault donates papers to UGA

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Charlyane Hunter-Gault, one of the University of Georgia's first black students, has given her personal papers to the university's Richard B. Russell Library for Political Science and Studies - a donation one UGA scholar called a "milestone" for the university.



Hunter-Gault (File)

Library officials revealed the gift only this week, though Hunter-Gault actually let librarians take the first installment of her papers two years ago from their storage place in New York, said Sheryl Vogt, director of the Russell Library.

But only last month did Hunter-Gault sign documents transferring the papers to the library, Vogt said.

Hunter-Gault and the late Hamilton Holmes broke the color barrier at UGA on Jan. 9, 1961, after a federal judge ordered UGA officials to admit the pair.

They were soon followed by Mary Frances Early, a graduate student in music education who became the first black student to graduate from UGA.

All three went on to notable careers, Holmes in medicine, Hunter-Gault in journalism and Early in music education.

Librarians also hope Early and the family of Holmes will donate their personal papers to the libraries - papers that will become critical documents for future researchers, according to UGA English professor Barbara McCaskill.

Collections such as Hunter-Gault's papers will give access to primary historical sources for students, historians and just plain citizens in the future, said McCaskill, a co-director of the library's Civil Rights Digital Library project.

But Hunter-Gault's gift is also important for another reason, McCaskill said.

"So much of the material it chronicles tells us how important it is to recognize that the goal of the Civil Rights Movement was not to achieve a color-blind society, but to encourage Americans to see differences, to respect and honor differences, and to learn to love each other and not to hate each other," she said.

Hunter-Gault's gift contains material from high school up through the early 1990s, including research materials, notes and drafts from Hunter-Gault's 1992 autobiography, "In My Place."

The material also includes correspondence and other material spanning three decades of Hunter-Gault's journalism career.

Now 68, Hunter-Gault worked for the New York Times, "The MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour," National Public Radio and CNN, where she was until recently bureau chief in Johannesburg, South Africa.

"We're looking at a woman who was not only on the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, but also the women's movement," said Vogt, who counts herself an admirer of Hunter-Gault.

Vogt asked Hunter-Gault to give the papers, and went to New York to get them when the journalist agreed.

"I think that she was willing to step out and do what she felt was right, and went on to have a very good career. I admire that about her," Vogt said. "She went beyond going to the university. She really used her education and has been very successful."