

Wanda Harris Yearbook Collection (AC144)

Introduction:

The Wanda Harris Yearbook Collection includes yearbooks from 1960 and 1961. The 1960 yearbook is historically significant because it features Gloria Ray Karlmark, a member of the Little Rock Nine—the nine African American students who desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. After this event, her family moved to Kansas City, where she graduated in 1960 from the newly integrated Kansas City Central High School. Gloria and Wanda became friends during this time. A penned message from Gloria can be found in the 1960 yearbook.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Central High School

Title: Wanda Harris Yearbook Collection

Date Range: 1960 - 1961

Size: 0.209 Linear Feet (1 box)

Collection Number: AC144

Donor Information:

Kelly McCoy, June 2025

Citation Note:

Wanda Harris Yearbook Collection (AC144), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Related Collections:

AC07 Sumner High School Collection

AC09 Lincoln High School Collection

AC71 Central High School Yearbooks Collection

AC72 Kansas City Regional High School Yearbooks Collection

AC73 Jackson County Genealogy Collection

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Historical Sketch:***Central High School***

Central High School, established in 1867, is the oldest school in Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO). Initially, the school board rented rooms on the bottom floor of the Stark Building at 11th and Locust, as they did not own any school buildings until after the Civil War. The board purchased the Stark Building outright in 1868.

In 1882, the Stark Building was demolished, and a new school building was constructed on the property. The school later relocated to a new site at Linwood and Indiana in 1915. Originally a predominantly White school, Central's demographics changed after the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, becoming predominantly Black. In the 1990s, the school moved again to the area of Indiana and 33rd Street.

In 2012, its name was changed to Central Academy of Excellence. A decade later, in 2022, Central was among the ten schools that the Kansas City Public Schools proposed for closure; however, this proposed closure was ultimately canceled in 2023.

Little Rock Nine

The Little Rock Nine were nine African American students who enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957, sparking the Little Rock Crisis. Initially, Governor Orval Faubus prevented the students from entering the racially segregated school, but President Dwight D. Eisenhower intervened.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional, prompting the NAACP to register black students in previously all-white schools. The Little Rock school board agreed to comply with the ruling, and a plan for gradual integration was approved.

By 1957, the NAACP had registered the nine students due to their excellent grades and attendance: Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Minnijean Brown, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo Beals. Ernest Green became the first African American to graduate from Central High School. When integration began on September 4, 1957, the Arkansas National Guard was called in to prevent the students from entering. However, on September 23, Eisenhower issued an executive order to federalize the National Guard, directing them to support the integration and protect the students.

Collection Inventory:

Series 1: Yearbooks

- f. 1 1960 Centralian
- f. 2 1961 Centralian

Processed by Kat Miller, Assistant Archivist, June 2025

Sources:

Bunch, Lonnie. 2017. "The Little Rock Nine." National Museum of African American History and Culture. Smithsonian. 2017. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/little-rock-nine>.

"Encyclopedia of Arkansas." 2016. Encyclopedia of Arkansas. CALS. 2016. <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/gloria-cecelia-ray-karlmark-726/>.

Kansas City Public Library. Accessed June 2025. <https://kchistory.org/image/central-high-school-9>

Kansas City Public Library. Accessed June 2025. <https://kchistory.org/image/central-high-school-7>