

Source Packet for Lyda Moore Merrick (1890-1987)

“My father passed the torch to me, which I have never let go out.”

I. Who was Lyda Moore Merrick?

Lyda Moore Merrick was born in Durham, NC in 1890. She attended Scotia Seminary in Concord, NC, and then Fisk University (a prominent HBCU), where she graduated magna cum laude in 1911. She continued her education at Columbia University then returned to Durham where she taught piano, was engaged in the arts, and was active in community service. She was greatly admired and respected for her work with organizations such as the Federation of Negro Women’s Clubs and the Durham Colored Library’s Board of Directors.

She was by birth and by marriage a member of two of North Carolina’s most prominent families. **Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore**, her father and **John Merrick**, her father-in-law, were among the founders of the **North Carolina Mutual** in 1898 - the largest and one of the oldest Black-owned businesses in the United States. (**James Shephard**, also quoted in NC Freedom Park, was also a founder.) In 1888 her father, Dr. Moore, became the first Black physician in Durham. He went on to found **Lincoln Hospital** in 1901, which served the Black community during segregation. He also founded Durham’s **Colored Library** in 1913, and led the movement for the improvement of rural schools for Black children.



*The women who helped build Durham’s Black Wall Street:
Hattie E. Livas/ **Lyda Moore Merrick**/ Susie V. Gillie Norfleet/
Martha Merrick Donnell/ Bessie Alberta Johnson Whitted*

Lyda Moore Merrick’s most important work was arguably as an advocate for the blind. Most notably, in 1952, she founded **The Negro Braille Magazine** (later named **The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind**), the only national publication dedicated to the needs of blind Black persons. John Carter Washington, who was born blind and deaf, was a life-long friend who provided Mrs. Merrick inspiration. (Washington began life as a foundling, under the care of nurses at Lincoln Hospital where Lyda’s father worked. Dr. Moore brought the baby to Lyda’s home until a foster family could be found for him.) Their close friendship lasted for over sixty years. John inspired Lyda to think about ways of helping people who were blind. After founding the magazine, she served as editor for the next eighteen years. “My father passed a torch to me which I have never let go out. We are blessed to serve,” stated Mrs. Merrick in her ninety-second year.

II. Source Evaluations

A. Watch this short **1:30 min. video** in which Durham artist Ayanna Albertson honors Lyda Moore Merrick’s spirit with a spoken word poem. →



<https://tinyurl.com/2p83ru4h>

- What words or phrases stand out to you from the poem?
- What do you think is Ayanna Albertson’s intended message about Lyda Moore Merrick? What techniques does Ayanna Albertson use to convey this?
- How are you left feeling about Lyda Moore Merrick after listening to this poem and why?
- If you gave this poem a new title, what would it be?

B. Lyda Moore Merrick Obituary, February 15, 1987

- List 3 interesting things you learned about Lyda Moore Merrick from her obituary.
- In what ways did Lyda Moore Merrick have a positive impact on the community?
- Choose a phrase from the obituary that you think best describe Lyda Moore Merrick.

III. Quote: Consider Lyda Moore Merrick's words that are inscribed in NC Freedom Park, "*My father passed a torch to me which I have never let go out.*" What message is she conveying? Why do you think the creators of NC Freedom Park selected this particular quote to include? What did they want us to know (about her, and/or about freedom generally?)

IV. Discuss:

- Based on everything you have analyzed and discussed, what five words or phrases would you use to describe Lyda Moore Merrick?
- What about Lyda Moore Merrick do you find inspiring and why?
- Why do you think Lyda Moore Merrick is included in Freedom Park?
- What questions would you like to ask her if you could?
- Why is Lyda Moore Merrick's life story important, both now and for as well as for future generations?

2/15/87

Lyda Moore Merrick, 96, Founder Of A Magazine For The Blind

The founder of the *Merrick-Washington Magazine for the Blind*, Mrs. Lyda Moore Merrick, 96, of 829 Lawson St., died Valentine's Day morning in Durham County General Hospital.

Inspired by "a little blind baby" named John Washington, whom she temporarily adopted in 1922, Mrs. Merrick started the magazine from scratch by saving notes, clippings and filings from other magazines and then condensing them for her magazine two weeks before each quarterly issue hit the press.

Merrick recounted in a 1979 interview with the *Durham Morning Herald* that money was a continual problem.

"I was a poor beggar, but somehow each issue came out," she said.

"Ed [her husband, E.R. Merrick] would often dip into his own pocket to help.

"I would say, 'Ed, we owe this to the Lord ... we have been saved to serve,'" she said.

"The Braille magazines in existence at the time carried no news of black accomplishments, and I thought it was time for us to know the truth," she said.

Mrs. Merrick often said that in her quest for material she tried to use what would interest her if she were blind.

Issues on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Eleanor Roosevelt were the kind Mrs. Merrick liked, as well as those with an emphasis on black history. She was known to use excerpts from such periodicals as *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Essence*.

The first magazine of its kind in the world was first published under the name *The Negro Braille Magazine*. The name was changed in 1979.



Lyda Moore Merrick
Started magazine from scratch

"Our race went through many name changes; we were negro, colored, and then black. The board [of the magazine] decided that we didn't want to just be known as black anymore ... so the name of the magazine was changed to *Merrick-Washington Magazine for the Blind*," Mrs. Merrick's daughter, Constance Merrick Watts, said in a telephone interview Saturday night.

The *Merrick-Washington Magazine for the Blind* is now published semiannually with an average of 78 pages.

Founded in 1952, it continues to be supported through contributions and about 600 subscribers. Dr. Ila J. Blue is the current editor.

"I became interested in start-

ing the magazine because I have a great deal of respect for the blind," Mrs. Merrick said in the 1979 interview. "They don't call it a handicap, just an inconvenience."

Mrs. Merrick was a native of Durham County and was a 1911 graduate of Fisk University. She was a member of St. Joseph's AME Church, where she was a member of the choir, played the organ and taught Sunday school. She also was a member of Daughters of Dorcas Club, Volkemia Literary Club and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and was past chairman of Stanford Warren Library board.

Mrs. Merrick received the Community Recognition Award in 1982 from Daughters of Isis of Zafa Court No. 41. She was chosen as one of the Mother's of the Year of 1979 by the Durham area Merchant's Association.

She was the daughter of Dr. Aaron Moore, Durham's first black physician.

In 1981, she also received the Baha'i Community of Durham Humanitarian Award in observance of World Peace Day.

The funeral will be conducted at 2 p.m. Tuesday in St. Joseph's AME Church by the Rev. W.W. Easley. Burial will be Beechwood Cemetery.

Surviving are two daughters, Mrs. Vivian M. Sansom of Raleigh and Mrs. Constance M. Watts of Durham; eight grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

Memorials may be made to *Merrick-Washington Magazine for the Blind*.

The family will receive visitors from 6 to 7 p.m. Monday at Scarborough & Hargett Memorial Chapel.

Fundraising Brochure for "The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind"

A Vivid Past

Over the years, *The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind* — a magazine written completely in Braille — has illuminated world events for many sightless citizens.

The magazine began, as most far reaching ideas do, with one person, Lyda V. Merrick, listening and caring about the wishings of her sightless friend, John Carter Washington.

"There needs to be some kind of news publication for blind readers," he told her.

Mrs. Merrick heard Mr. Washington and the result of long hours of diligent effort was the creation of the *Negro Braille Magazine* — a free publication for the blind.

But good ideas don't confine themselves to social groups and races. The *Negro Braille Magazine* crossed the lines of ethnic lifestyles and now serves a diversified audience in the United States and throughout the world.

Mrs. Merrick served as unpaid editor of the magazine until 1969, financing the project from contributions of friends and businesses. Later, under able editorships of Charlotte Hackett and Margaret Whisenton, the publication made large strides in readership and management.

As *The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind* enters its 30th year, the tradition continues on even a larger scale. The magazine seeks to reach more readers, more often. But your support is needed to do so.

Editorial and Production

The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind draws its editorial content from articles of well-known publications. Articles are grouped under various subject headings such as National and International News, History, People,



Editorials, and Entertainment. The magazine also provides space for letters to the editor and a special section for announcements of interest to the sightless.

The 76 page publication printed in no. 2 Braille carries no advertising. Even so, contributions have allowed the magazine to sustain its circulation annually.

Our Readers Wait

Readers of *The Merrick/Washington Magazine for the Blind* have come to want and expect our