# The Story of Victorine Quille Adams with Dr. Ida Jones

“It’s More than History Lecture Series,” sponsored by the Baltimore National Heritage Area and Presented by The Peale

March 22, 2024

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

Welcome everybody. I'm Nancy Proctor. I'm Chief Strategy officer and founding director of The Peale, Baltimore's Community Museum. It's my very great pleasure to welcome you to this second talk in the 2024 It's More Than History lecture series produced by the Baltimore National Heritage Area and presented by The Peale. Today's event features a presentation by Dr. Ida E. Jones, who will be speaking about educator and activist Victorine Quille Adams. Dr. Jones is the Morgan State archivist and became intrigued with Victorine Adams during Morgan's sesquicentennial, I challenge you all to say that five times fast, sesquicentennial celebration in 2017. Dr. Jones is a consummate scholar who believes deeply in the words of Mary McLeod Bethune, who stated, "Power must walk hand in hand with humility and the intellect must have a soul."

(00:00:59) Today's online program is being recorded and the recording and transcript of the discussion will be available after the program on our YouTube channel in about a week. Now, during this presentation, please keep your mics on mute until the end of the program when we will open up the floor for questions. You can add your questions to the chat in this Zoom session at any time and we'll try to answer them during the Q&A session after the presentation. We have Shameika an ASL interpreter with us who will be interpreting the entire discussion and chat. Thank you very much, Shameika. You can also turn on closed captions in your Zoom toolbar. I'd like to add that accessibility is a core value at The Peale, so you'll find almost all of our programs are ASL interpreted and captioned. So please tell your friends. Our aim is to be accessible to all.

The Peale's mission is about amplifying and sharing the voices and stories that too often have been overlooked or intentionally erased from the historical record. So before we get started, I'd like to acknowledge that The Peale in Baltimore stands on the traditional ancestral lands of a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Piscataway and the Susquehannock. Our work is ongoing to better understand the pre-colonial history of our city and region, and also to support the Indigenous peoples who are part of our communities today. I'd like to thank Ryan Koons and the Maryland State Arts Council for the land acknowledgement references they've made available to us and to local leaders like Ashley Minner Jones for ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and recognized in Baltimore today. You can pick up your free copy of the illustrated Guide to East Baltimore's historic American Indian Reservation walking tour map from The Peale, and also download the Guide to Indigenous Baltimore, the app for free.

You can go ahead and sign up for the next lecture in this series, which will be held on April 12th, on The Peale's website. And while you're there, check out the candlelight concert we'll be hosting on Saturday, April 7th and other upcoming programs both online and at The Peale that you might enjoy. Now I'm happy to introduce Shauntee Daniels, Executive Director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area. Shauntee, thank you for once again allowing The Peale to present the compelling and insightful talks that are always part of the It's More Than History lunchtime lecture series. Please take it away.

Shauntee Daniels:

(00:03:34) Good afternoon everyone. The Baltimore National Heritage Area is always delighted to bring these programs to our community and beyond. Baltimore is a place of famous people, famous places, and famous events that have created our national history, contributed to our history. So it's really important that we continue to bring these stories to you. I've known Dr. Jones for quite some time and Dr. Jones has just been a real friend of the heritage area in her work at Morgan State University. So I'm not going to go back into her bio, but I will tell you she is currently the co-president of the National Collaborative of Women's History Sites. She's a board member of the Maryland Women's Heritage Center, advisory board for the National Women's Suffrage, National Monument Foundation.

And just based upon that, I would like to tell everybody about an event which is connected to the Women's Heritage Center that is coming up soon. They are going to be going to New York to see the stage play Suffs, S-U-F-F-S on April 28th. It is $185 and it's a round trip bus coach to New York City with breakfast and I'm sure they will introduce you to more history of the Women's Suffrage Movement. So with that, I'd like to turn over this program to my friend and our colleague, Dr. Ida E. Jones.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:05:32) Good afternoon everyone, and thank you Shauntee, as well as The Peale Museum, Nancy and staff, thank you so very much for having me. I will share my screen here and we will get started on our discussion about an endearing person I have come to grow to like posthumously, Victorine Q. Adams. So the topic for the day is Speaking Truth to Power: In and for Community. And I see in the audience number of friends who are a Baltimore resident or Baltimore affiliated or Maryland native so or neo-native, so I look forward to a hearty discussion. The presentation will explore three areas for her life, Victorine E. Quille and the Baltimore, which she was conceived and grew up in. Then who was Victorine Q. Adams? And then her legacy in Baltimore. And as you've heard a number of times, I'm at Morgan State University and it's important to understand that Morgan was founded in 1867, thus the sesquicentennial that Nancy was stumbling over.

We all stumbled. It took us about five or seven years to learn to pronounce it, and that's when Morgan turned 150 in 2017. Initially it opened as a training school or a seminary for African-American men in Methodist Church ministry and it has since grown into a urban public research university. So there's the commercial for Morgan if anyone should choose to report me back. So I want to discuss very briefly Victorine E. Quille's Baltimore. She was a native Baltimorian. In 1912, the year Victorine Adams was born, there were 61 African-Americans lynched that year. She was born 47 years after the end of chattel slavery with the passage of the Emancipation Act proclamation and 16 years after the United States Supreme Court decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson, which declared the doctrine of separate but equal. And I call it the blurry lines of African-American citizenship, gained greater focus in the 20th century.

(00:07:38) Victorine's generation will be the first efficient steward filled with race, pride and impelled to act or to impelled to action for coming generations. So when you think about this, she's born in 1912 almost 112 years ago in terms of that. And so I just wanted to understand the world in which she was conceived in the Baltimore in which she lived. So that being said, the nature and nurture aspects are very important in terms of crafting personality and destiny. So for Victorine Quilles, Baltimore was the best incubator for this pioneering destiny because even though it was a hard segregated line along race as well as white ethnic groups and other groups, it was a place where you could be affirmed as a person. So even though there was hard levels of segregation, she had no issue with personality or confidence because she was in an environment that incubated and encouraged her sense of self-esteem.

So according to Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, a retired professor from Coppin, blending northern and southern characteristics, Baltimore represented confusing inconsistency. As throughout the South, Jim Crow laws created two separate worlds, which could only meet when the meeting was essential to whites. So that becomes a matter of economy and employment. Education was separate, churches were separate. So there were literally two worlds growing parallel at that time in which she was coming along. Here are some pictures from her collection and they're very clear of the segregated life and the simplicity of that life. On the left of your screen is the James T Dorothy, I believe he's an operator of some sort here. I used to be able to see that, but so you see that this is a Black business and he looks like he's probably in auto mechanics and such. And then you see over here to the right, the school MARMF, the school MARMF.

Here she is pictured once again in the middle with these other young women who were school teachers at the particular time. I'm not going to go that deep into that. I really want to talk about her, how she becomes Victorine Quille Adams. The E comes from the state archives. So it was a Victorine Elizabeth Quille. That is her birth name. I've never seen her use the E. So she always used the Q, but her official name was Victorine Elizabeth Quille before she marries in 1935 to Willie Adams. So she is Victorine Q Adams. She is now a school teacher, club woman, voter education advocate, boutique manager and politician. Here she is at the age of five months. And I think I saw Rob Schoberline, my fellow archivist in the audience, and of course we would be very discouraged with these pin pricks. But apparently in the corners it was posted somewhere with a thumbtack.

(00:10:38) But this staged image is a very middle class value in 1912 of the first child born to her parents. Very adorable. She died at the age of 93, so she was very intentional about documenting her own life history. Here she is with her brother, she did have a brother William, and he did have some children. She herself did not have children. It's funny, this piano bench that they're sitting on, we had one in my family as well with the claws and the balls that were very quite nice. And so here she is at the age of five and her brother is three.

So we now can leap to her adult years at Morgan State. She is a Morgan State graduate. She graduates from Morgan State College in 1940. It's important to notice the number of women in this class. She also obtained a teaching certificate from Coppin Normal School in the 1930s. Here she is with the orange star on her right shoulder. The class is nearly 50 plus people and there are less than 20 men in this photograph. So this is the advent of World War II, and so you're going to find a bursting number, a plethora of women matriculating through Morgan State majority during the 1940s and late thirties.

Interestingly enough, what she's going to do is she's going to go into the field of teaching, and that's going to be a very prominent place because Cop in normal school was created by the state of Maryland to give African-American women certification to teach. They did not want to integrate the University of Maryland College Park. So separate entities were created such as Bowie State, which predates Morgan in 1865. That was to be for teachers. They eventually leave Baltimore City and moved down to Prince George's County, but it was principally Coppin State normal school where a number of women from that generation, when it was a two-year school, matriculated to get their teaching certification.

So the feminine profession, African-Americans had a challenged history with education, both legally and logistically. The end of slavery flung open the doors to education. Victorine's generation benefited from the zeitgeist of the 19th century desire, which was education because it was illegal to teach an enslaved person to read. I'm sure we are familiar with Frederick Douglass and his narrative and having to find ways to learn to read. So it's no surprise that African-Americans viewed education as an essential aspect of middle class values, and the Quilles were no exception. They believed in education. I don't have the history of her parents' education. I know that her mother came from the eastern shore, so it's very interesting to see what that would've looked like for her coming from an agrarian space into an urban center. So to that end, there were four feminized or pink college professions that most women aspire to during that generation: a school teacher, a librarian, a social worker and nurse were very attractive to women educating women to go into to work.

(00:13:42) And in Baltimore teaching was a desirous goal because that benefited the entire community, and second to that would be nursing or medicine. So the idea is that education would then lift the entire race and lift everyone, both parent and child out of the darkness of ignorance as well as empowering them to be greater citizens. I love this picture here and all these pictures are from her collection here at Morgan State. This is her 1930s classroom. So you can see that the taller of the two is Victorine in the back. She was very petite and she's a full adult at this point. So you see one of her students is nearly three quarters of her height. So it's very interesting. And once again, these pin pricks in the corner, very concerning. But like I say, the picture existed and it survived and it's I guess nearly 90 years old at this juncture. Also, you can read a lot in terms of the students being fed in the classroom and then how intimate the classroom is. All these children are African-American in this classroom.

So Victorine was an activist, she along with veteran activist Lily Carol May Jackson, Ms. Jackson was the president of the Baltimore NAACP and also known as the mother of the Model of Civil Rights Movement. She innovated nonviolent tactics against racism in Baltimore. So this is an endeavor by the civic leaders for the Red Cross. Here is Victorine Adams. This is Willard Allen who was an insurance salesman and a board of trustees member at Morgan, and also the most worshipful grand master of the Maryland Prince Hall Masons. And then you have Lily Carroll Jackson over here. It's been my desire to try to identify these other persons in the photographs, and I know some persons with longer Baltimore memory than mine could very well help me to identify these people. But these are going to be the movers and shakers of that 1930s, '40s era in Baltimore city.

And so I found it very interesting that she is such once again a diminutive person in such a space with movers and shakers in Baltimore city. She was also into philanthropy and social activism in other areas. So this is another image from her collection and it's from the Democratic women. This is the caption on the back, which I'll show you. They were educating the Baltimore Bullets and honoring them for their integration policies. I'm not a sports historian, but my uncle Ralph is, and he said the Boston Celtics were the first to bring a colored person onto the NBA. But the Baltimore Bullets must have been a close to the second or third in the 1950s to bring into the ranks a African-American players. So we do have names for this. From left to right is Ruth Turner, Zelma Johnson, Ada Smith, Victorine Adams, and Tim Hawkins and MC pictured also with Dr. Barksdale.

(00:16:31) And we'll see on the back the capture. So here's Victorine with the orange star. I'm assuming these tall gentlemen must be players on the team. So I love this because she did take an effort to caption it, and that's where I read, "The Democratic women entertained the Balto bullets, honoring them for their integration policies," pictured those individuals. And then very clearly, I cannot recall all the names of the players. So that's being very frank. And once again, you see a lot of where and clearly the mounting on the back of the photograph, but it survived and we have that information there. Then she was also into leisure. Her husband Willie Adams purchased land in the eastern shore area and bought a beach and he called it Altonia Beach. And Altonia Beach was a private segregated beach for African-Americans. Once again, everything in the Jim Crow age was parallel, so they were white and Black versions of most everything.

And since African-Americans were not welcomed at Ocean City or a variety of other spaces where whites would summer, they created their own beaches. And so Altonia Beach was where they purchased the land and they would use for summary activities. These pictures have such movement to them and you just feel like you're actually with them in the water. So here is Victorine and I believe this is a cousin of hers in the back and other classmates and friends. On the right hand side is here she is, another orange star next to her mother-in-law. She says on the back, Claudia Black is listed as Willie Adams mother. So these are friends, family and other African-Americans who are summering at Altonia Beach, and they just made it a space. They reserved the space in, I don't want to say Annapolis, but in the southern shore there where they actually have now made that land a park, a state park that cannot be violated with any kind of commercial buildup.

I really want to pull her from the shadows of her husband, Willie Adams. I'm not sure if you're familiar with him, but for those who are unfamiliar with him, he was a transplant from North Carolina to Baltimore City in the 1930s. He was a very brilliant and talented person who never had the luxury of going to school formerly because he came from an agrarian background. So picking cotton and other kinds of farming is what he had to do. So school was not a principal option as he was raised by his grandparents because his mother and his father I don't believe were married and therefore left a strain on his grandparents, so he had to help out. When his grandmother dies, he eventually leaves his grandfather and migrates during that great migration period to Baltimore City East side, by the way, and makes a way of running numbers because he had a photographic memory.

(00:19:14) So he was able to become a numbers runner and greatly increase his capacity for wealth. And as he grew in wealth, he was able to purchase property and, what's it called again? Ground rent and other spaces around the city to be able to do very well for himself. And as he becomes rather popular in his numbers running and then his legitimate businesses, he is going to eventually court athletes and entertainers. So this is Willie Adams here in profile. And I think we all might know this face. This is a very, very young Muhammad Ali and I had a pleasure meeting with the Nation of Islam and the brother told me who all these men were and who the photographer was because this was a Nation of Islam photographs and the Nation of Islam photographer. And so I really appreciated him sharing those names with me. Of course, I didn't write it down for this presentation, but I do have them.

Then on this much earlier picture, here's a very, very young Billie Holiday in the middle here at the Club Casino, which Willie Adams Open. So Club Casino I believe is on Pennsylvania Avenue and one of your kind of nighttime adult spaces. And then there's a pugilist here, Henry Morgan. And these other two persons, I don't know this couple here or this woman here, but this is once again all the images from the collection. They're very rich photographs where they tell a part of Baltimore life that's not captured in the words of the Afro-American or in the common knowledge unless you lived during that era. So from the thirties to the sixties, you're going to see all this happening in her collection. Another point of interest is that she was a school teacher. She taught in a segregated school. Maryland did not ratify the 19th Amendment until 1941, and that's very interesting.

They were along the lines of southern states that really did not want to enfranchise Black women. They did not vote in the ratification of 1958. So in response to the 1941 ratification, Victorine started the Colored Women's Democratic Campaign Committee. And the Colored Women's Democratic Campaign Committee sought to educate colored women on the vote. What is the ballot? Why should we vote? What does that mean? She even bought a machine so they could actually engage the physical device of polling levers and doing all the manual things that go along with voting during that time period so there'd be no hesitation or fear. She would meet with them in their house. So here we have a candidate, Phil Goodman, who was Philip Goodman who's running for an office, who's coming to the home of Victorine Adams to engage her code Women's Democratic Campaign committee and really pressing him on what his agenda would do for their community.

(00:21:54) You weren't just simply going to have our vote. We want to be able to engage the candidate and make sure that their agenda will meet our need. Here she is in the corner once again by an orange star. So Goodman was a member of the Senate, Maryland Senate in Baltimore city from 1955 to 1960. He was elected to the Baltimore City Council, president of the city council and became the mayor of Baltimore in '62. And this image is from the Clinton Studios. All this is the metadata or what we call the caption material on the reverse of the photographs. And these are members of her Colored Women Democratic Campaign Committee. She also believed in the youth, so she was also seeking to kind of blaze a trail forward but also do lateral work with her contemporaries and also do the longitudinal work of bringing youth along.

So she had skating parties. So the skating party for junior registration cups sponsored by the Democratic Women and Parks Sausages. Here is Harry Parks. Those of you may or may not know who he is, he was an independent businessman out of Ohio who had been a friend of the Joe Lewis. And Joe Lewis introduced him to Willie Adams. And so he had this great idea of this big farm that was being sold in the north, and he wanted to basically go into the sausage business. Once again, during the era of Jim Crow, African-Americans did not have the luxury of walking into a bank to get a loan. Actually contemporarily, they can't really do that as well. So what William Adams did was that he became the collateral for Parks. And it's my understanding in one reading that he either took either 75 or $85,000 and put it into a briefcase and went to the bank and said, "Here's your cash. Give him the loan. If he defaults, you already have your cash."

And that's how Parks Sausages got started. Had I known, I loved park sausage when I ate that kind of meat years ago, the spicy was the best, but here is Henry Parks who will be a businessman and politician and friend of the Adams family. And then here is Victorine to Adams with the young people. I would love to know the names from these young people. Clearly this is the 1950s, sixties, and they might still be around, if not maybe their children. I don't have names for these individuals. So once again to my colleague Rob Schoberline, oh, the tearing of the pictures, it's heartbreaking. But at least we have the image and we have the context. So that's exciting. And all these children were encouraged to ring doorbells and get out and vote. So she was getting them to be civically minded in terms of stewardship of democracy, not just simply waiting for some, but also being engaged in the process.

(00:24:28) Chuck Richards was awarded a prize for the talent contest. Free refreshments and preadmission were offered to all people. Along the lines of the Colored Women Democratic Campaign Committee by the late 1950s. She's going to morph into another group called Women Power Incorporated, and this is a page from her scrapbook and it says here at the bottom, "Women Power Leaders, Mrs. Victorine Adams left and then Ethel Rich, Co-Chairman of Women Power. Women hold registration voter registration." And they met at the Sheraton Belvedere that month. It's believed to be that that meeting at the Sheraton Belvedere in '58 was the first integrated event they had at that hotel. So this woman here, Ethel Rich, is actually a social worker who worked at Providence Hospital. And so they had a great affinity for reaching out to the community. Now, I think most of us might know who this gentleman is here, but this is Mayor Schafer, under which Victorine served as a city council person in her collections of the proclamation declaring a particular day Women's Power Inc Day.

So William Schafer, governor.... not governor, Mayor Schafer at the time was very keen on who she was. Just a side note, I had the pleasure of meeting Mary Pat Clark, who was a councilman during the same era as Victorine much her junior, would say how Schafer would refer to her. And another woman by the name of Barbara Mikulski who was also in the city council as council girls. He never referred to Mrs. Adams as such. He would always call her Councilwoman Adams whereas the others, he was rather dismissive and derogatory by calling them city council girls. And I believe it was because of the large shadow of Willie Adams behind Victorine that made him somewhat cower. But we know where Barbara Mikulski ended up, a remarkable career starting out as a social worker, one of those feminized professions and seeking to change the policy to impact our field to the level of policy on the national level. So very interesting relationship there.

(00:26:31) So then what happens? She goes from being a teacher in the thirties, forties, to this idea of a political voting rights educator. Then she realizes one, "I should run for office as well." So here in the 1960s, she's going to run for the city council, although she was in the state senate initially in '66 when she realized there were two other Black women at that level, but nobody was in the city of Baltimore. She said, "Let me go to the city." So here is one of her campaign brochures from the collection and their thing was MAP. "Michael Adams Parks vote for the map ticket city council for." And once again, this pulling of the levers was part of the machine she had. And then we see this name here for Mayor de Alessandro and for those of us who don't know, that would be the family of now Speaker for Life as they call her Nancy Pelosi. So it's very interesting to see the kind of overlapping elements of all of that in terms of Victorine's life.

So we have here the reverse side of the campaign brochure where they spell out who each individual is, what they've committed themselves to do and how they seek to make the city a better place. And so at the end of the day here, I think it's very interesting when we look at campaign literature now, people aren't so quick to identify their religious affiliation or some of the other things they did, but they're very open about their church activism in this particular era of politics as well as their successes and their accomplishments. And then there are other organizations they affiliate with. So here we have the idea of helping to solve neighborhood problems and being interested in unemployment and underemployment. That's huge because she was an employer. She eventually, when she gets elected, will also help create and bring projects to the city to raise employment and underemployment issues.

And then also I met someone who I think is her niece or grandniece who also sought to use the idea of bringing jobs to the city because at this time period, a lot of factory work, a lot of manual labor was leaving the city, creating small if not growing underclass populations who do not have skills that could translate into modern work, but they still desire to work. So I found this to be very interesting as well. So then she becomes elected in 1967 to the city council. She is the first African-American woman to serve on the city council as an elected officer. And then she's going to start to once again bring this voting rights education, voting registration consciousness to that city level to help other generations of young women. I love this here where it says women's fair, Women Together January 22nd, 1975. Best decade ever of the 20th century if you ask me.

(00:29:19) But nevertheless, putting herself in a space to identify younger women to go into politics, to go into city service or civic service. Then this gentleman here, another mentee, a very familiar face, that is Kweisi Mfume, I believe it might've been Frizzel Jackson at that time, and it has become Kweisi Mfume. But he was one of her kind of mentees as well. So it went from just simply encouraging women to looking at those who are outside of the bail of politics to consider the work and voting rights and education. So here is a check for $21,000, and this is for the Baltimore Fuel Fund Incorporated. And so what happened in 1978 along the eastern seaboard, for those of us who were here might remember, there was a blizzard of '78 and that literally shut down the eastern seaboard. I remember elementary school, we did not have to go to school for I don't know how many days. It seemed like forever school was closed and it really caused great disaster in terms of heating and climate.

What happened in Baltimore City, from my understanding and my reading, is that some people who had been on the fringes of losing their utilities were cut off. And in the midst of being cut off from their utilities, they eventually used alternative fueling or heating sources that led to fire as well as death. And being a moral and catholic person, she was appalled by that, Victorine was appalled by that. So she created the Baltimore Fuel Fund Incorporated, which was a public private partnership to bring together monies to help subsidize those individuals who were in arrears with their utilities. And I believe what economists had said that the amount of arrears were $200 to $300. They weren't thousands of dollars in debt, they were in small pools of money that they owed to be able to pay for their heat utility. We have now since passed legislation, I believe nationally, that persons cannot have their utilities cut in the midst of a crisis. This pandemic has shown us some other kinds of ideas of morality, but that's a conversation another time.

So she created all kinds of gimmicks to raise the money. Paddles for the People. So there were paddle boat races and once again, an advertisement for the fuel fund. Her husband, a very wealthy entrepreneur, put some of his money in the midst of it as well. So it was a public private partnership to help people pay their bills. And this is a very dashing picture of her in that 1970s period. I love this image as well. Another image from her collection. I had one gentleman called a rose among thorns, and now this one actually, I had to get someone to identify the kid is and I want to thank Senator Mitchell for being very helpful to helping me identify these people who I do not know, but he helped me.

(00:32:13) So loyal Randolph here was a delegate, and it was my understanding from Larry Gibson, preeminent Baltimore everything guy that he was her mentor politically. She really esteemed him in terms of how he moved politically, and he mentored her, that Victorine was mentored by loyal Randolph. Then there's Larry Young, John Jeffries, Senator Michael Bowen, Mitchell, Abner Lee, Clarence Mitchell III, Ray Haysbert, Willie Adams and Sterling Page. So I believe this is my man, Haysbert, who was very much in response to the form caterers. I think someone in his family recently passed away. But nevertheless, this is Willie Adams, her husband, and then of course Sterling Page. So these are the men and women that used to be men that held position in the city and in the state and were very supportive of her, most likely because of him, but also she was effective in her doing as well.

So when we look at her legacy, this is my last slide to kind of look at her life in Baltimore. Victorine Adams speaks truth to power through her archival collection in particular, I did not know who she was and the appeal was during this 150th for Morgan. But in doing more research about her, we were in the same sorority and I was living in Washington DC. She's in Baltimore. Our paths crossed, but I never knew who she was. And I thought it to be very tragic because she lived contemporaneously with me. It wasn't like she was 18 something, she was 1990s, the 2000s. I was here in this area and had known about her. So I really felt compelled to have her words speak for themselves, to revive her and put her where she belongs. In the contemporary memory of Baltimore City, her intentional activity sought to situate her life along with other women, through documenting every aspect of her life.

The pictures record mundane activities, voter education sessions, international travel, leisure moments, and businesses throughout the Black community or Black Baltimore. The documents and artifacts chart the changes in Baltimore's political landscape from 16 wards in the city to 14 districts. The structure and the membership of the Colored Women's Democratic Campaign Committee and Women Power Incorporated provide a blueprint for successful club activity. Ultimately, she understood the [inaudible 00:34:46] or the emotional aspects of knowing the past.

(00:34:51) So she knew at the age, her parents probably gave it to her, her 5-year-old picture. I mean, there's thousands of pictures in her collection that chronicle her life. She was impelled to share, empowering rising generations and an opportunity to reach further and to do more. So I believe that is her legacy. It's my understanding that I believe current Speaker Jones and former mayor Catherine Pugh were members of Women Power Incorporated. So I want to thank you for your time. This is my contact information if you want to take a picture of the screen and we can talk more about Morgan's collection or we gladly can have some conversation going into this now that I've finished my presentation. Thank you for your time and once again, thank you Baltimore Heritage area and the field.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:35:42) Thank you so much, Dr. Jones. Wow. Like you, I just feel like, "How did I not know about this woman before?" I'd like to ask you to start the Q&A session by maybe speaking to that. Why do amazing people like Victorine Adams just fall off of our radar?

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:36:07) That's a very good question. I think it's just a glut of information that's out there. She never thought to make herself known. She was working for the community and the people. She was very clear in her archival collection how important she was, but she never promoted herself as such. She believed in the we-ness of it all. So as we the community, we the Baltimorians regardless of race, gender, or class, us moving forward. So I think in the idea of her being so inclusive that it just falls off the radar, not there to be the glue anymore. And no one's promoting her because she left structures in place that can be self-promoting. The fuel fund still goes on to this day and there are other states that have picked up this idea of a fuel fund because of the Maryland model that was started by Victorine. So I think that's part of it. She did not seek to make herself grandiose. So as a result, people didn't think about it.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:37:02) Yeah. And I'll have to say that resonates for me a little bit about perhaps how women were raised to be, which was not self-promoting. Maybe things have changed a little bit in the era of social media, but yeah, it's unfortunate because it does take then scholars and historians like you to excavate that past and bring their good work back to our attention. Could you maybe talk, we've got a question in the chat about the collection of photos that seems to have been such an important resource for you in your research. Where did you find those?

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:37:44) Yeah. I really have to applaud Victorian posthumously. She was very intentional from my understanding, from one of the librarians who was here during her depositing time that she brought them herself. But the fact that she took so many. I even contacted I guess the Phillips family, another Black family that was very noted in photographs, and they basically told me that she purchased everything that was taken of her. So the grandson of the great grandson's in charge of the family photographs. And he was explaining to me that, "Yeah. I think she has everything but you're willing to look at what I have." But she was very intentional about documenting herself and ensuring that she had what she needed. So the collection is extremely rich with the photographs.

Even we had a visitor from the state capitol to come to look for the Altona photograph because they have no images of that beach. They know about it, they've heard about it, they understand the dimensions of it, but they had no images from that time period. So they came in, there were hundreds of pictures of her at that beach. So they had a golf course and there was a baby contest. There was of course a beauty contest. They had radio hosts. Ella Fitzgerald would go out there. So they had national entertainment out there, a radio station out there that would kind of cover the activities on the beach. So they had all that resident in the photograph. And of course there's people that I don't know because no captions. And just fabulous 1950s images. Everyone was pretty apparently back then. I don't know what we call ourselves now, but very stylish. And so as a result, you have all these images of varying stages of community that she kept. And like I said, except for the pin pricks, they're great images.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:39:27:00) Yeah, they are. And the clothes are fabulous, I just have to say.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:39:32) They're dashing. Very dashing.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:39:34) Yeah. Shauntee, why do you think that Victor's story is still relevant today and what compelled you to invite Dr. Jones to give this talk today?

Shauntee Daniels:

(00:39:46) Well, I think the most important thing is that there are so many people that have done great work in Baltimore that are not recognized or people don't know about them. And I think that what happened with Victor Rings with Dr. Jones' book is my office colleague brought the book at a women's heritage event and she brought it in and she sitting on my desk and she goes, I think you should read this. This is very interesting. And she knows that I'm always looking for the unknown stories in Baltimore. I had never heard of Victor Ring until that book. And so I started going through the book and looking at her connections with other organizations.

And I have to tell you this, I just want to announce the elephant in the room. It was odd to me that she was married to Willie because he has a very checkered past. If you read the Not in my neighborhood book, Willie was a gentleman that believed in, "By any means necessary, am I going to lift myself up?" And so when I found out that Victorine was married to him, I was like, "Whoa." But she appeared to be a woman that was her own woman. He was just a partner. She was out to change the way that our children in Baltimore were treated, how they were educated. And so you have to give her her own respect. She's not just Willie Williams... Was it Williams? Little Willie. Little Willie Adams's wife. She was her own person. So I'm always looking for women that are trying to do for themselves, but they're also lifting other people up while they do for themselves. So that's why Victor is a mini idol in my catalog.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:42:10) And you've brought so many people like that to our attention through this series. Thank you again for that. Dr. Jones, is there anything that you came across in your research that you didn't have time to include in this talk, but that you'd like to just flag and maybe plant the seed for a future talk about more aspects of this story?

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:42:33) Yeah, thank you for that. When I finished processing the collection, I was happy that the book came out as well. So that to me was a done deal. So as I'm going through the collection here being the inaugural archivist at Morgan, there was five boxes that had just brown boxes, no identifications, no labels. And they were full of what? Victorine Adams material. So apparently there were constituency letters and other kinds of things from her administration for the four terms she sat on the council. And some of those letters are very moving. In light of how the archives are growing, I haven't had the luxury to go back to them. But there's an appendix to the collection of at least another three feet of material that need to be gone through. So there should be some more conversation about what she did legislatively. I was looking at her the person, and her the teacher, and her the politician.

But people were more concerned about her legislation. What does that look like? What law did she help pass in the city? And so I haven't gone through them yet, but they're there and I think that's a conversation that needs to be had. Another conversation of note is that she was married for 70 years to William. They both lived into their nineties and she predeceased him, however he admired her for her education because she eventually does go, I believe to Columbia or somewhere, New York University and gets a certificate in business. He bought the charm shop. So she had a boutique, a couture dress shop on Pennsylvania Avenue that of course the Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald would go and shop in.

I met one woman who was a student here at Morgan who wanted to get her debutante cotillion dress there and just remarked about how being invited into this space as a young woman was what she'd heard about. The carpet shag was so deep, she sank in the carpet shag and it was this uber feminine uber space that just blew her away in her eighties, reflecting back being 15 or 16 as a young woman and buying that gown from that particular shop and just the treatment and the kind of who these women were. And I could just watch her eyes as Ms. Smith was recounting this and kind of going through her eyes to see what that must have been like.

So he bought the shop for her called the Charm Center, and that's where she ran her business selling boutique and couture fashion. At the same time, at night she would hold her meetings there for the Democratic campaign committee, and then she'd also teach shop to young women, high school and I guess what you call middle school on dress and deportment. And there's some language in her collection about what colors to wear in terms of lipstick and what kind of slips, girdles, bras.

These are other practical things that we don't think about in terms of how young women become women. And she was very much instrumental in helping them get that together and through her shop, the Charm Center. So there was a lot more she was doing in a granular aspect for the community. And that I think needs to be brought out some more. I think we're missing some of those leaders now or some of those individuals who did that because a lot of the young people are just kind of randomly out there like weeds growing wild because there's no real investment in them collectively to keep the guardrails on and go straight, whatever straight looks like for you, and kind of just get certain things under your belt before you start to do other things.

Shauntee Daniels:

(00:46:01) I don't mean to interrupt, but which also speaks to the history of Pennsylvania Avenue. And I am definitely not old enough, but I'm very nostalgic. And so you're kind of torn between two worlds. You are torn between about the racism and the segregation and all of those things and all of those things. But on the other side, Black people thrived in their community. They lifted one another up, they had cotillions, they had debutante balls, they had social clubs. And that's the nostalgia in me. I always look at that and say, what would've been like to get dressed in a formal, not just for your prom, but you're going to be introduced to society? And before being introduced to society, you were taught what fork to use and what all of these utensils at the table setting mean. That is the kind of thing that I think Dr. Jones was alluding to about our young people don't know these things.

People go to restaurants now and they don't know what fork to use. They'll use any fork. Or having what's the proper I guess wear to a semi-formal versus a formal and what's business wear. And we have gotten just generally as people have gotten more relaxed anyway, because I know that there were days when a woman would never leave the house without her lipstick on and without her dress on or her girdle. And I hate to say that, but that's the way my grandmother was. They wouldn't leave the house and you leave the house now looking with our sweatpants on. They were like, "Where are you going?" And that reminds me of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Charm Center and all of the businesses that were aligned there. So there is just a wealth of knowledge that lives in West Baltimore of how people live their lives, even through the racism and the oppression.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:48:22) To Ms. Henry's point, Ms. Henry's been blowing up the chat here and I thank her for that, she's kind of co-signing on a lot of it in terms of not being able to wear pants, which I believe at most schools and HBCUs, they could not wear pants outside of the dorm. So one of my friends who was a Howard graduate would under her trench coat pull up her pajama bottom so they couldn't see that she was wearing pants and keep her trench coat on. And I know some of that is rather old hat, and I understand things have to modernize. But I think if you have some classical standards, it's to your advantage then you know how to freestyle. But I think it's become so obtuse that people don't know what to do. And so there are some issues there. And I was trying to get back... Oh, so back to her politics.

So with the College Women's Democratic Campaign Committee, she has a manual in the collection on how they are to dress and comport themselves. And then she'd go to these city council meetings and she says the script is if you're asked the question, say miss or missus, name, voter, registered voter. And she told them, do not take notes with a pen and paper because people stop to talk when you're taking things down like that. Try to take as much as you can in your head so they can talk freely and then bring that back to the group and we'll discuss it in greater detail. So she was very strategic in that regard. And women got paid to go. So if you couldn't go, you had to tap somebody else in to go for you. But they were paid to go to these meetings to sit and listen and reconnaissance and bring things back.

And a lot of it had to do with schools in terms of in that West Baltimore area where they were opening schools or school safety. She was very clear that they wanted certain policies to be in place, pay equity for Black teachers, a lot of different agenda items. So she was very clear with those women how to go to these meetings and present themselves. And for African-American women in particular of that era, you're talking in the forties and the fifties, it's called respectability. So you had to dress a certain way to be taken seriously, even if you were domestic or even if you did not have, "a formal education." You still had to comport yourself accordingly. And so she's very clear on that and no slip showing and no this and no that.

And so I think sometimes that was very helpful to kind of conform to the expectations of society so that you weren't having to have anything to say, "I'm being rejected because of this. I look like everybody else. I sound like everybody else. Why can't I attain?" And so that thing about taking notes was very interesting because she was very clear, "Do not take out any paper. They'll freeze their conversation or feel hesitant in their conversation." And they were very successful in kind of taking it in their heads and bringing back the who and the what of those conversations.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:51:05) Amazing. We've got a few minutes left here for further questions. I do want to encourage anyone who would like to speak up, you're welcome to turn your mics back on, unmute and ask them by voice or put them in the chat. This being Smalltimore of course, I couldn't help but notice all the ways that your work, Dr. Jones, is relevant to and intersecting with some things that we've done at The Peale. And I was very happy to see Dr. Brian Morrison join us, who worked with us on the exhibit called Education Will Be Our Pride about The Peale when it was male and female colored school number one. Now this was 19th century, so 1878 to '89. But I'd love to think about the ways that Victor's history with education kind of expands that narrative into the 20th century.

Our storyteller in residence, Mama Linda Goss, did some work at the same time that Dr. Morrison and Tanika Berkeley and others were working on the colored school history. And she is a graduate of segregated schools and talked about how she felt like the quality of education when the schools were segregated in many cases was higher than post-integration. I see Dr. Morrison's raised his hand. Maybe he wants to chime in on that topic and love to hear your response too, Dr. Jones.

Dr. Morrison:

(00:52:51) Good afternoon everyone. I'm sorry. I'm tardy for the party. And just as I jumped in, Dr. Jones was mentioning about the women going to the meetings and taking notes on the meetings, and a lot of those meetings had to do with issues of education. So the first thing that came into my mind was I wonder what it was, what were some of those issues that they were reporting back? The next phase of my research goes into the colored school system and the post Brown years. So I'm sort of curious, Dr. Jones, if you could share any further insights as to what kinds of educational issues specifically the women were reporting on. If you have anything on that, I'd appreciate it.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:53:51) Yeah, thank you for that. They were principally concerned about the schools, the physical structures. We now call it sick building syndrome or what have you. So a lot of the schools did have detrimental health hazards in the building. Clearly this is the 1950s, so it's not going to have the kind of technology or expectations of now, but they were a sick building. And so the idea of rebuilding and or fixing the physical structures of the building, then also the location of the building. There was the one case where they wanted to open up the school somewhere, and it was between two bars or something and a very vile adult space. And they said the children shouldn't have to step over drunken corpses to get to school.

So the idea of locating the schools, fixing the schools was huge during that time period. The post Brown period, what happens is dynamic Black teachers are taken out of the school and sent to the county. And then they're replaced by subpar individuals of both colors. So the idea that the brain drain happened where the teachers that were very brilliant, dynamic and dedicated were literally siphoned off to the county really led to the implosion of the school system. That's not to indict everybody who's teaching as a bad teacher, but it definitely did shift the temperature in the field of education in that time period.

Nancy Proctor:

(00:55:08) The other thing that I'd love to maybe record you telling some more focused stories on is about her interaction with Baltimore's mayors. We're actually doing a tour now of the mayor portraits that are in City Hall and working with Matt Crimson on that. But it would be wonderful to, as part of that tour, have links out to information about other people, as it were, some of the women behind those mayors who were almost until recent history all men.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:55:49) I'm not sure if Dr. Morrison had a follow-up to the statement I was saying, and then I'll gladly answer your question.

Dr. Morrison:

(00:56:03) I've got a lot more questions. But yes, that was sort of where my head was because the similar issues were still in my earlier research in African-American education in the 1800s. Those were similar kinds of issues that they were dealing with. But I'm curious about the brain drain to Baltimore County because that's where initially Black teachers were able to teach out in the county. When Baltimore County started its public education system, Black teachers, that's really the only places they could teach. They couldn't teach in the city, so they were in the outlying counties, and it definitely was. Once Brown came into full force, it took a while because many people in the Black community did not want to integrate and go to the integrated schools. They wanted to stay in the Black schools and stay with their Black teachers because of the culturally responsive pedagogy that those teachers were practicing. But in any case, I'm a bit curious about that shift of teachers going out to Baltimore County and how that occurred. But that's further research down the road for me. Thanks for raising the question for me.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:57:20) No worries. I'll be reaching out to you anyway because I'm working on Francis Harper and I see you at the William Watson's Academy, which was her uncle. So I'd definitely be reaching out to you for the bicentennial of Francis Harper, the niece of William Watkins Harper, a preeminent educator in the 19th century. So we have lots of [inaudible 00:57:36].

Dr. Morrison:

(00:57:38) And she taught at his school. She was a teacher there as well. Yeah. So yes, definitely.

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(00:57:544) So education is key here. But to get back to your question about the mayors, she served for four terms on the council, and I believe she was friendly with all the mayors. Like I said, Schafer, because I have the lived experience of both Mary Pat Clark and to a lesser extent, Barbara Mikulski. I've not spoken to her directly, but I have spoken to Mary Pat Clark about him being somewhat chauvinistic. But she got along with everybody for the most part, whether it was the looming shadow of her husband that forced compliance or whether it was just simply her grace and tact, I don't know. But I believe Martin Mandel and then D Alessandra, she was very close with him as well. And I know that in 1967 or '68, she was the Democratic National Committee's LBJ Booster for the state of Maryland. So she was very connected to the Democratic Party in terms of federal, state, and city government. So she was very dedicated to that idea.

And when she retires, it's going to be Kurt Schmoke in '83 when she leaves office, and she was very affinity with him as well in that Kweisi Mfume generation of young people that were being mentored or kind of inspired by her generation. So I don't have any concrete quotes to share, but I can definitely go back and look in the collection to see the nature of the exchange. But from my understanding, what I've seen is very peaceful, pleasant relationships of professional consideration and respect in that particular thing with mayor and city council first.

Nancy Proctor:

(0:59:16) Well, with that, we have hit the top of the hour. Shauntee, would you like to make any further comments or questions before we thank everybody and send them on their way? You're muted, Shauntee.

Shauntee Daniels:

(00:59:34) I'd like to thank Dr. Jones for being willing to take an hour and a half out of her life to present. I'm not sure if she may want to let us know where her book is being sold, so if anyone wants to read more about Victorine, there is a wonderful book that was written through Morgan by Dr. Jones. So I want to say thank you to her. I want to thank the production team over at The Peale. The Peale is a great partner of ours and so they produce these programs for the benefit of the public. It is education to know where we came from and where we're going to and knowing these people. So I'm really proud about that and thankful that we could bring these programs to you. The last thing I really want to tell you is on the 12th of April, it'll be our last program, and everyone knows about how Baltimore is turning into a incubator, a tech hub, and people are coming here to think about starting their businesses and entrepreneurialship.

So on the 12th, our program is going to be is Jon Goldman from the B&O is going to look at Baltimore's relationship to maritime and the railroad. Two things that change the dynamics and the economy of Baltimore. So we have this wonderful opportunity to see that Baltimore reinvents itself every 50, 80, 100 years and we become even greater and stronger economically. So I hope you will join us for that. That's on April the 12th, 12:00 noon. And there'll be lots of information about it coming your way in the weeks to come. So I'd like to thank everybody for being here today and have a great weekend. And by the way, it's Palm Sunday this Sunday, so all of those that go forth in the Christian way, have a wonderful Palm Sunday.

Nancy Proctor:

(01:01:48) Thank you so much, Dr. Jones and Shauntee. And thank you also, Dr. Jones, for putting the link in the chat to the Maryland Women's Heritage Center. I was trying to put a link in the chat to places to buy your book that were not Amazon, but there are plenty of ways to get it. Also, I think there's an audio version now too. Is that right?

Dr. Ida E. Jones:

(01:02:10) I'm not sure. I have to check. I don't know. I haven't had the time to check.

Nancy Proctor:

(01:02:15) I was searching here. I think I spotted that. So anyway, please do check out Dr. Jones's book. Please do sign up to attend the April 12th lecture from Baltimore National Heritage Area. And if you enjoyed this program, you can support future such programs by making a donation through Baltimore National Heritage Area's website or just putting the link in the chat there. Just donate and we'll keep all this great brilliance and insight flowing. Thank you again to everybody.