

Manet Fowler Obituary

Anthropology News, March 2009

Manet Helen Fowler, 87, died January 13, 2004 in Oswego, New York, without an obituary to



publicly mark the end of her life. Word about her passing surfaced after her extensive Black Americana collection was auctioned last year. Born on May 26, 1916 in Ft Worth, TX to parents who were educators dedicated to “uplifting the race,” Fowler distinguished herself as the first African American woman to earn a PhD in anthropology from a US university. She was also a journalist and creative writer.

After studying journalism and anthropology at Washington Square College of New York University, Fowler pursued graduate studies at Columbia (1940–43), where she studied with Ralph Linton, Ruth Benedict and Gladys Reichard. Because of interests in applied research, she transferred to Cornell, where a program in applied social science had been established. She completed requirements for her PhD in the department of sociology and anthropology and the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Course work exposed her to the theoretical and methodological frameworks of anthropology, sociology, social psychology and the emergent field of human relations in industry. Her 1952 dissertation focused on the 1950 service workers’ strike at Cornell, which she characterized as a human relations situation grounded in labor, racial and interpersonal conflicts. Informing her analysis was a synthesis of key elements from the personality and culture studies that psychiatrist and anthropologist Alexander Leighton promoted and William Foote Whyte’s social interaction brand of industrial and organiza-

tional sociology. Fowler’s two-volume dissertation, “The Case of Chef A: An Inquiry into and Analysis of a Human Relations Situation,” offered an ethnographically rich and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the multiple causes and consequences of the strike. Her analysis of the university’s industrial life illuminated the hierarchical relations and the centralized, depersonalized mechanisms of control that vitiating work conditions and morale.

Fowler collaborated with Robin M Williams on the research that resulted in *Strangers Next Door: Ethnic Relations in American Communities* (1964). She worked at Tuskegee Institute undertaking fieldwork on the changing healthcare practices of rural black families in Alabama. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she was director of research in the New York State Department of Health. Throughout much of her career, beginning in the 1940s, she worked as a consultant in public relations, fundraising, program development and evaluation, and policy analysis. Over the years, she also taught anthropology and black studies, usually as a lecturer or adjunct, at several colleges and universities (including Barnard College, Bard College, SUNY Cortland and Syracuse University). In 1967–71 she directed Family Service Center, which was part of Syracuse University’s School of Social Work. She directed participatory action research on the racial and gendered aspect of aging. The local community collaborated in the implementation and management of the project. The university did not renew Fowler’s contract, prompting her to file an affirmative action suit that alleged racial, gender and age discrimination. In later years, she pursued interests in ethnogerontology and lifelong learning. (*Faye V Harrison*)

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Poughkeepsie Journal
Manet References 1964 & 1965

August 22, 1964

Anthropologist, Former Baptist Pastor Set To Speak at Programs at Salt Point Church

The Rev. Charles E. Byrd, a former Baptist pastor in several county churches, will be guest speaker tomorrow morning at the Central Baptist Church, Salt Point. Tomorrow is Women's day at the church, with another guest speaker, Dr. Manet Fowler of Millbrook, scheduled to present a program in the afternoon.

Mr. Byrd, a chaplain in the Air Force currently stationed in Denver, Colo., resides with his wife in Hopewell Junction. He formerly served as pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Green Haven; Ebenezer Baptist Church, city, and the Central Baptist Church in Salt Point. Mr. Byrd is a graduate of Howard University and of Union Theological Seminary.

Dr. Fowler will speak at 3:30 p.m. An anthropologist, Dr. Fowler was the first Negro woman to receive a doctor of philosophy degree in her field in this country. She is a graduate of Washington Square College and Cornell University, and has the distinction of being the first Negro to serve on the faculty of the anthropology department at Washington Square College.

Dr. Fowler currently is working in research for the State Department of Health, preparing a series of publications based on two studies in public health conducted under grants from the National Institute of Health.

Mrs. Gretchen Reed, organist of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, will be guest soloist for the day.

The Rev. Robert W. Dixon is pastor of the Salt Point church.



DR. MANET FOWLER, Millbrook, an anthropologist, is one of two guest speakers to appear tomorrow at the Central Baptist Church, Salt Point, in observance of the church's Women's Day.

October 27, 1965

Mr. Fowler, Baptist Layman

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Stephen H. Fowler Sr., a leading Baptist layman and the father of a Bard College professor, died Sunday in Syracuse. Mr. Fowler, 84, who lived and worked in New York City, was attending a Baptist convention when he apparently died of a heart seizure.

His daughter, Dr. Manet Fowler, is an anthropologist at the Annandale-on-Hudson college. His son, George H. Fowler, is chairman of the New York State Commission on Human Rights.

Another daughter, Mrs. Rosemarie McDyer, is a field representative with the Human Rights Commission. A second son, Carroll L., is a teacher in the New York City School System.

Mr. Fowler's wife, the former Manet Harrison, also survives.