



**Image.** Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields, founder and chief historian for The Black Archives. (Source: Photo courtesy of Dorothy Jenkins Fields, news.miami.edu).

## Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields, Ph.D.

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields, a Public Historian, Certified Archivist, Historic Preservationist, and Journalist, is a retired career educator from the Miami-Dade Public School system, and the founder of The Black Archives. For over a half century, Dr. Fields has been a leader in documenting and preserving Black history in Miami-Dade County. Dr. Fields was born in Miami's Colored Town, today known as Overtown. When she was still a child in 1948, her entire extended family moved to the Glenwood Heights subdivision in Brownsville. She remembers her uncle, Dr. S. H. Johnson, MD, South Florida's first Black medical doctor with a specialty in Radiology, telling her, "Dottie pack your things. We're going to move, because the white business community is going to move from Flagler Street all the way to 20th Street, and by the time you grow up, there won't be any Black people in Colored Town because they're gonna be made to move. White people want to expand downtown Miami."<sup>1</sup> Her family left Colored Town almost twenty years before the Expressway project (I-95/I-395) was built in 1967. While living in Brownsville, Dr. Fields remembers attending family and social events at Georgette's Tea Room, owned and operated by one of Dr. Fields' godmothers, Georgette Scott Campbell. Campbell previously owned and operated a restaurant in Miami's Overtown and one in Harlem, New York City.

The Black Archives website provides the following account of Dr. Fields' inspiration to record Miami's Black history:



**Image.** Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields receiving the 2011 Mary McCall Collins Award, the State of Florida's highest preservation award, presented by Governor Rick Scott and the Secretary of State. (Source: Photo courtesy of Dorothy Jenkins Fields).

*In 1974, in preparation for the nation's bicentennial, she began a search for curriculum materials on the Black experience in South Florida. When she was unable to find any information about South Florida's Black history in any school or public library, she embarked on a journey that would become her lifelong professional mission. The first step in her journey was to establish The Black Archives, a nonprofit manuscript and photographic repository for the legacies of Miami's black community. The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc. was founded in 1977 by Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields as a non-profit organization to collect and preserve the rapidly vanishing material that reflects the African American experience in Miami-Dade County. Over the years, the collection has grown, and the Black Archives is now a national resource for this history of the 19th and 20th centuries, providing a rich repository of materials that is used by scholars, students, teachers, the media and the community alike.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Jenkins Fields, Oral History Interview with FIU Honors College Student Franci Perez, November 2020, Professor Shed Boren. Videos and transcripts on file with Plusurbia.

<sup>2</sup> The Black Archives Website, "Meet the Founder" <https://www.bahlt.org/meet-the-founder> accessed 03 February 2023.



**Image.** Miami Herald featuring special coverage of Dr. Fields' legacy. (Source: Photo courtesy of Dorothy Jenkins Fields).

**Image.** Newspaper photograph of Dorothy Jenkins Fields, founder and chief historian for The Black Archives. (Source: The Miami Herald).

The Black Archives contains extensive archival materials related to the history of the Brownsville neighborhood.

Dr. Fields also began saving historic sites including the Chapman House, Lyric Theater, Dorsey House and Dr. Johnson's X-Ray Clinic. She conducted the research to include Brownsville resident Gwen Cherry in Miami-Dade County's first book about women, *Julia's Daughters: Women in Dade's History*. As a Historic Preservationist, Dr. Fields served 19 years on Miami-Dade County's preservation Board and was chair for five years. During her tenure on the board Dr. Fields nominated Georgette's Tea Room and Lincoln Memorial Park Cemetery as county historic sites.

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields raised her two daughters in Brownsville. Her daughter Katherine is an attorney in New York and her daughter Edda is a history professor at Carnegie Mellon University and a 2025 Pulitzer Prize winner for her book *Combee: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom During the Civil War*.

