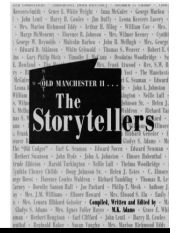


Excerpt from "Old Manchester II...The Storytellers," compiled, written and edited by Milton K. Adams; photographic reproductions by Anthony J. Thibeau. Published by the Manchester Historical Society, November 1995. Copies of book for sale at the History Center, 175 Pine Street, Manchester CT. Available online in the reprints section of our website www.manchesterhistory.org.



Historian John Rogers, 1907-1982

*Storyteller: Malcolm Barlow
from The Manchester Herald, 9/5/68*

JOHN E. ROGERS—ACTIVIST, RESEARCHER, TEACHER

"The answer is person to person contact and understanding."

John E. Rogers, of 1163 East Middle Turnpike, was born in the North End of Hartford and grew up there. He claims one of his few advantages as a black boy in Hartford was his black father. He was a Danish subject and had traveled widely. His philosophy on black men clashed sharply with that of his wife, who was from New Jersey, and often with their son.

Rogers said he now knows the thanks he owes his father for his healthy respect for black men.

Another advantage was the kindness of the people he knew in Hartford.

"People were not too poor that they weren't concerned for their neighbors, whites, blacks and Jews. With a sickness, the whole neighborhood was concerned," he said.

"I remember a Negro woman came home from working in a West Hartford mansion all day and she cooked up soup for a sick white friend.

"It was a rich experience." He finished school and studied electronics.

"They thought I was some kind of phenomenon," he recalled. "But no one would hire me."

He finally took an "acceptable" position for a young black man then and was the personal man to the president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co.

James E. Kearney, the company president then, was one of the finest men of any color Rogers has met, he said.

"Kearney was a fine man. I never saw him lose his temper. He was graceful to even the smallest man.

"It was good to experience the good and clean white man. The ghetto people today haven't seen one white man of quality."

After 10 years as a personal man, the future in the insurance field looked dim for Rogers and in 1935 he quit to work in the

U.S. Post Office in Hartford.

"Until recently, the insurance companies had very little to offer the Negroes. It's not an easy thing to do your best and see a lesser man move by you.

"If the black man has studied and has no moral stigma, but he's just a black man, he has to have a lot of faith and stamina to survive."

Rogers was the first black hired by the postal service in Hartford. He was a part-time clerk in 1928. He held more firsts until nine years ago when he was made superintendent of the Bishop's Corner Post Office.

He was not the first black to move to Manchester, but in 1938 he took his family to their present home and became one of a handful of black families here.

More than twenty years ago, Rogers became historian of the black Prince Hall Lodge of Masons. The black Masons hold the only charter for the English Masons.

The early handwritten records of the black Masons fascinated Rogers and he began more research into the Negro's share of New England history.

He has spent much of his free time at Yale and Boston Universities pouring over their books on black men and has been in steady touch with historians at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Howard is the most prestigious of American black schools.

He has also gone over the diaries of black Masons and the family histories of black men in a white Connecticut.

Now Rogers is leaving the postal service to devote full-time to his studies and to teaching black history.

He will go from school system to school system holding sessions with students, teachers and parent-teacher groups. His aim will be to change school curricula to conform to historical facts.

Rogers will begin a library of materials at the University of Hartford to help school systems set up courses in Negro history and culture.

Rogers thoroughly enjoys explaining what men with black skin have done throughout recorded history. He often begins a story by saying, "I'll bet you didn't know that . . ." And he often finishes by asking, "Now where do you find that in

America's history books?"

Some of the facts he brings out are:

- Egyptians had dark to black skin
- Black men of the Upper Nile were the best men of medicine for centuries
- Moses was black
- Jesus was at least dark
- Emperor Constantine was converted by a black pope

Among the honors Rogers has received over the years are:

The 33rd degree of the Masons—the highest honor they give.

He was Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masons

The St. Benedict Award of the Catholic Interracial Council of Hartford

Member and Deacon of the Board of Religious Education of the Bolton Congregational Church

Member of the Connecticut Council on Human Rights

The Charter Oak Medal from the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce for public service

A spot in "Who's Who in Civic America."

"There's no such thing as white or black history," Rogers said. "It's all together. I often come across a bit of history of an area white family and I tell them. I'm interested in people."



Herald photo by Pinto

HISTORIAN JOHN E. ROGERS
... he was active in civic organizations