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James Terry founder of the Willie Harris Collection talks with Susan Juge about photos in the campus exhibits. - Photo by Ryan P. Knight/DIGEST

Pictorial history of the Willie Harris Collection

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On a leisurely walk in Scotlandville, photographer James Terry stumbled across a treasure that would tell the story of African-Americans in the Baton Rouge community.

Terry found approximately 40,000 photographs taken by the late Willie Harris that had been bagged and left for the trash by Harris' family.

Harris was a resident of Scotlandville and the first chief of police for the Southern University Police Department. He was also a professional photographer who captured every aspect of the world around him. Those images included religious ceremonies, life at Southern University and famous people such as Muhammad Ali.

Terry said that it was only fate that he happened upon the photographic treasure. "All of this was done by God and God doesn't do anything wrong," he said.

The historic pictorial collection of the late Willie Harris is on display in the American Heritage Gallery located in the Smith-Brown Memorial Student Union. Two hundred photos are on showcase and the exhibit is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Terry, a curator, coordinated the exhibit that displays many of Harris' works. He has also published a book every year for the last three years that contains an assortment of photos from the collection.

"The exhibits usually bring a smile to people's faces because they may see someone that they know in the photographs," Terry said. For more information about the Willie Harris Collection you can visit the website at www.home.earthlink.net/~jtphoto4u.com.

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