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### 20220216\_Margaret Charles Smith- An Extraordinary Midwife

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# HSLIC News - LibGuides at University of New Mexico

## Margaret Charles Smith- An Extraordinary Midwife

by Amy Weig Pickering on February 16th, 2022 | [o Comments](#)

The practice of midwifery within the African and African American community in the United States dates back to the 17th century, when Europeans forcefully enslaved and kidnapped [African women skilled in midwifery](#) and brought them to the United States. These enslaved women, in turn, passed on their knowledge to others.

Until the late 19th century, the majority of births were attended by midwives, many of whom were Black, Indigenous, or immigrant women. Most midwives, including enslaved women, drew upon traditional healing knowledge and practices passed down through generations. Others learned their practice through apprenticeship, either from local physicians or experienced midwives in their community.

One African- American midwife who made incredible contributions to the field of midwifery is Margaret Charles Smith. Smith had her first midwifery experience at the age of five while assisting during the birth of an infant of the wife of a cousin of her future husband. Smith caught the infant as the birth was taking place and before the midwife was able to make their arrival to the home.

Although Smith only completed formal education through the third grade, she continued to learn about midwifery. In 1949, Smith obtained a permit from the Greene County Public Health Team to practice midwifery and she became one of the first of Greene County's official midwives in Alabama.

During her 35-year career, Smith delivered over 3000 babies to mothers who were often malnourished and in poor health. Despite this, she lost almost none of the babies nor mothers in childbirth. Smith was able to successfully deliver twins, babies who were in the breech position, and even premature babies. Many times Smith's services were provided to mothers who could not afford to pay anything or they would pay for services with produce. At times Smith may have received payment up to ten dollars per birth she attended.

Due to her love of helping others, Smith would travel 200 miles to Tuskegee's Andrew Memorial Hospital (one of the first hospitals ever to admit Black patients) if one of her patients needed emergency treatment.

In addition to being an accomplished midwife, Smith has been bestowed with numerous honors which include being: the keynote speaker at the New Orleans Rural Health Initiative in 1997; honored by the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, D.C in 2003; and the recipient of a lifetime

achievement award at the Black Midwife and Healer's Conference in 2004.

Smith lived a full life despite the fact she suffered from uncontrollable hypertension and peripheral vascular disease. She died at 98 years of age in 2004. It is important to recognize the importance of Smith's accomplishments considering all the discrimination she had to endure.

We should celebrate the numerous contributions of **ALL** African-Americans not just during the month of February, but year round. If you would would like to learn more about Smith's amazing life please feel free to check out *Listen to me good : the life story of an Alabama*, by Margaret Charles Smith which is available for [checkout](#) at HSLIC.

#### SOURCES:

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