

Collection #
M 0731

FLORABELLE WILLIAMS WILSON COLLECTION, 1910–1995; BULK 1980S

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Processed by

Wilma Gibbs
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Amy C. Belcher
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Manuscript Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 manuscript box, 1 box of photographs, 1 oversize photograph, 2 artifacts
COLLECTION DATES:	Inclusive, 1910–1995; Bulk, 1980s
PROVENANCE:	Florabelle Wilson, 7507 Brackenwood Circle, N., Indianapolis,

IN 46260-5439

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1998.0232

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Florabelle Williams Wilson (daughter of James S. and Hattie Virginia Hollis Williams) was born in Indianapolis on 12 January 1927. She attended the local public schools including School #26 and Crispus Attucks High School. Wilson graduated from high school in 1944. She received a BS in Education from Indiana Central University (now University of Indianapolis) in 1949. She taught at Indianapolis Public School (IPS) #23 for eight years, later returning to school to work on a graduate degree in library science. In 1961, Wilson received an MLS from Indiana University. She married John A. Wilson (27 August 1920–22 June 1990) in 1964.

From 1957 to 1971 Wilson worked as an assistant librarian at Indiana Central University. She was director of the library from 1971 until her retirement in 1982. The first full-time African American faculty member at Indiana Central University, she was also the first black director of an academic library in Indiana. In 1971 she helped plan the interior design and select furnishings for what became the university's Krannert Memorial Library. A past member of the Indiana Library and Historical Board and the Soul People Repertory Board, she has served on the Indiana Historical Society Library Committee for nearly two decades. She is a member of the Indianapolis chapter of Zonta International (a women's service organization), Indiana Library Association, and the American Library Association and a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She is an elder at Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

While at Indiana Central University, Wilson developed the exhibit and slide/lecture presentation "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew." She was a contributor to other exhibits created during the 1980s including "This Far by Faith: Black Hoosier Heritage," edited by Emma Lou Thornbrough and "Bury Me in a Free Land," developed by Gwendolyn Crenshaw. Wilson has also mounted exhibits in conjunction with her West African travels to Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast. Other countries that Wilson has traveled to include France, England, China, Japan, Hong Kong, the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Mexico, and the Caribbean. She has presented talks and travelogues to schools, organizations, and historical societies. In recent years, she created a puppet that she has used to present African American history programs to public school districts throughout Marion County. Wilson has done public service appearances on local television stations, WTTV-4, WFBM-6, WTHR-13, and WISH-8 and Indianapolis area radio stations, WIAN and WGRT.

The recipient of numerous honors, Wilson was named a distinguished alumnus of Indiana Central University in 1986 and awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by the school in 1988. She received service awards from the Indiana Library and Historical Board and the Indiana Library Trustee Association in 1990. In 1993, IPS School #26 presented her with a Career Achievement Award.

Sources: Materials in the Collection; Henrietta Brown and Delores Smith, compilers, *Outstanding Black Women in the State of Indiana*, Indianapolis: National Council of Negro Women, Indianapolis Section, 1983, p. 112 (E 185.96 O88 1983); and Telephone Interview with Florabelle Wilson (conducted by Wilma L. Gibbs), 5 January 1999.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Florabelle Wilson has spent much of her life working as an educator and librarian. This collection includes material that she has collected from various sources over a period of time. Much of the collection pertains to Indianapolis individuals and families, churches, and organizations. (The collection contains several photocopies.) Most of the materials remain with their original groupings. These groupings have been arranged alphabetically. Folders containing artifacts and photographs have been removed into photograph and artifact boxes respectively.

The Ashford family lived on the southside of Indianapolis. In addition to many family photographs (Photographs, box 1, folder 2), their collection includes visuals of their church, St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Zion (Photographs, box 1, folder 9), located on Shelby Street.

Robert Briggs, M.D. signed copies of two books of poetry written by his mother, Christina Moody Briggs. He presented the books to Wilson in 1981. The books (box 1, folder 2), *A Tiny Spark* and *The Story of the East St. Louis Riot*, were published in 1910 and 1917, respectively. In 1994, Janet Steinhoff, one of Wilson's church members, gave her materials that she obtained at an estate sale after the death of Wilbur Grant's widow. Those materials are in box 1, folder 7 and Photographs, box 1, folder 3. Lucille Grant taught at IPS School #42. A 1955 yearbook from the school is in box 1, folder 39.

The Wilson collection contains materials pertaining to poet Mari Evans; artist Joseph Holiday; musicians, the Hampton family; and Crispus Attucks High School music teacher Norman Merrifield. The Merrifield materials contained in box 1, folders 12-13 and Photographs, box 1, folder 4 include musical scores, family and school photographs, and a transcript of a 1980 interview of Norman Merrifield. During the interview, Merrifield tells interviewer Florabelle Wilson that shortly after his family moved to southside Indianapolis in 1913, he recalled Reginald DuValle (Reginald DuValle and the Blackbirds) giving Hoagy Carmichael jazz piano lessons.

In February 1978, the Indianapolis Black History Committee and local radio station, WTLC (105.7 FM) presented "A Tribute to Wes Montgomery" at the Convention Center. A copy of the program booklet is in box 1, folder 14. The booklet contains short biographies and/or photographs of several renowned jazz musicians including Montgomery and his brothers (Monk and Buddy), David Baker, Jimmy Coe, Erroll Grundy, Slide Hampton, Freddie Hubbard, J.J. Johnson, Pookie Johnson, Larry Liggett, Larry Ridley, and Leroy Vinegar. It also contains biographical sketches of musical educators Russell A. Brown, James Edgar Compton, Norman Merrifield, and Laverne E. Newsome.

The Lillian Wallace materials (box 1, folders 15-17) contain several photocopies, many relate to Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the AME denomination. There are materials pertaining to the Indiana Conference of the denomination. The collection also includes interesting news articles (e.g. stories about Indianapolis natives and nationally renowned soprano Rosemarie Gore-Bigbee and tenor George Shirley) and several local obituaries. There is also a 1950 article about Roberts Settlement, an African American community founded during the 1830s in Hamilton County, Indiana.

Box 1, folders 18-34 and Photographs, box 1, folders 5-10 contain material pertaining to Indianapolis African American churches, mostly Baptist. Other denominations including AME, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian are represented, as well. There are church histories, newsletters, news clippings, program booklets, and photographs. The program booklets are especially useful. They generally contain church histories, a list of church officers and services, and photographs of church leaders. In 1961, the 21st annual City Churches Ushers' Union Convention was held at Mt. Caramel Baptist Church in Indianapolis. The program booklet (photocopy) in box 1, folder 23 contains a directory of local African American churches and a history of the Ushers' Union. The souvenir booklet also includes pages representing various churches with photographs of

their pastors and the leadership of their usher boards.

Will Owens, a local baseball player who played in the National Negro League was honored at a ceremony sponsored by Bush Stadium in 1995. The ceremony was held during an Indianapolis Clowns game. Florabelle Wilson attended the game. An unsigned jersey and a cap signed by Owens are in the artifacts collection.

Florabelle Wilson spent her library career at Indiana Central University located on the southside of Indianapolis. In 1980, she developed “The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew,” an exhibit pertaining to black families on the southside (box 1, folder 36, and Photographs, box 1, folder 11-12). Materials in the collection related to the southside include information about IPS School #19, Perry Township High School, and the Southside Peacetime Charity Club (box 1, folders 40-41, Photographs, box 1, folders 13-14).

After extensive renovation, the Walker Theatre Center reopened in Indianapolis in 1988. The gala opening was held on 14–15 October. It featured Roscoe Lee Brown, A’Lelia Bundles, Rosalind Cash, Isaac Hayes, Gregory Hines, Alex Haley, and the Jimmy Coe Orchestra. A program booklet of the event is in box 1, folder 44.

Photographs, box 1, folder 15 contains a few miscellaneous photographs. The identified photographs include the Cheatham family; the Miller family; Harriett Kelly; principal at Indianapolis Public School 19; Louvenia Hadley and her husband; and Judge Webster Brewer.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Individual and Family Histories

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Florabelle Wilson	Box 1, Folder 1
Florabelle Wilson, et al.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1
Ashford Family	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Christina Moody Briggs poetry publications	Box 1, Folder 2
Smith Henry Cheatham	Box 1, Folder 3
Mari Evans	Box 1, Folder 4
Wilbur Grant Family	Box 1, Folder 5
Wilbur Grant Family	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 3
Hadley Family	Box 1, Folder 6
Hampton Family	Box 1, Folder 7
Margerine Hatcher	Box 1, Folder 8
Joseph Holiday	Box 1, Folder 9
Lewis Hughes Family	Box 1, Folder 10

William M. Johnson	Box 1, Folder 11
Norman Merrifield	Box 1, Folder 12
Norman Merrifield Songs	Box 1, Folder 13
Norman Merrifield Family	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
“A Tribute to Wes Montgomery”	Box 1, Folder 14
Lillian Wallace Collection (1 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 15
Lillian Wallace Collection (2 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 16
Lillian Wallace Collection (3 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 17

Series 2: African-American Churches

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Baptist Associations	Box 1, Folder 18
First Baptist Church, West Indianapolis	Box 1, Folder 19
Free Will Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 20
Garfield Baptist Church, Baptism Scene, [copy of Cirkut photograph in two pieces]	OVC Photographs, Folder 1
Garfield Baptist Church [copy of Cirkut photograph]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 5
Greater St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 21
Immanuel Presbyterian Church	Box 1, Folder 22
Mt. Carmel Baptist Church (City Churches Ushers' Union Convention, 1961)	Box 1, Folder 23
Mt. Helm Missionary Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 24
Mt. Paran Baptist Church	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 25
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
New Bethel Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 26
New Garfield Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 27
Olivet Baptist Church (1 of 2)	Box 1, Folder 28

Olivet Baptist Church (2 of 2)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 8
Penick Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion	Box 1, Folder 29
Pleasant Union Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 30
St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Zion (1 of 2)	Box 1, Folder 31
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Second Christian Church (now Light of the World Church), Men's Union Bible Class	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 10
Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 32
South Cavalry Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 33
Stewart Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church	Box 1, Folder 34

Series 3: Black Repertory Group

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Black Repertory Group, Berkeley, California	Box 1, Folder 35

Series 4: Exhibits

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Exhibit: "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew" (1 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 36
Exhibit: "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew" (2 of 3)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 11
Exhibit: "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew" (3 of 3)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 12
Exhibit: "Maroon: Black Art and Black History Merge"	Box 1, Folder 37
Indiana Avenue	Box 1, Folder 38

Series 5: Indianapolis Clowns

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Indianapolis Clowns Baseball Cap and Jersey	Artifacts: R2021, R2022

Series 6: Southside Indianapolis

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
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Indianapolis Public Schools #42 yearbook, 1955	Box 1, Folder 39
Indianapolis Public Schools #19	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 13
Perry Township High School	Box 1, Folder 40
Southside Indianapolis	Box 1, Folder 41
Southside Peacetime Charity Club	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 14
Stuart Mortuary, Inc.	Box 1, Folder 42

Series 7: Walker Theatre

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Walker Theatre Renaissance	Box 1, Folder 43
Walker Theatre Repertory Showcase	Box 1, Folder 44

Series 8: Miscellaneous Photographs

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Miscellaneous Photographs	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 15

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Traditional Search" icon.
3. Click on the "Call Number" radio button.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0731).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.