

Collection #
M 1200
OM 0599

RANSOM FAMILY PAPERS, 1912–2011

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Processed by

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 16 manuscript boxes, 1 photo box, 2 flat file manuscript, 6 color photograph folders, 2 OVA color photograph folders, 1 OVA photograph folder, 8 oversize manuscript folders, 1 envelope of negatives, 2 artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: 1912–2011

PROVENANCE: Judith E. Ransom-Lewis, 2015

RESTRICTIONS:

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: M 0399 Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1919) Papers, 1910–1980; M 1141 Minnie White Ransom Collection, ca. 1930–2001

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2015.0029

NOTES: Color photographs are stored in cold storage and will take additional time for retrieval.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Freeman Briley (F.B.) Ransom, 1880–1947

Born on 7 July 1880 in Grenada, Mississippi, Freeman Briley Ransom (also known as F.B.) was a prominent African American lawyer, business man, and civic leader. He met wife Nettie Cox of Jackson, Mississippi, in Nashville, Tennessee, where he attended Walden College.

Ransom completed his law education at Columbia University and moved to Indianapolis, Indiana around 1910. He met Madam C.J. Walker and became lawyer and business manager of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. Aside from managing the day-to-day operations of the company, he also handled Madam Walker's personal legal matters. Ransom operated a law firm with partner Robert Lee Brokenburr (1886–1974), who took over as general manager of the Walker Mfg. Co. following Ransom's death. Brokenburr also helped with the incorporation and early legal work of the company.

Aside from working as the lawyer for the Walker business and as an independent attorney, Ransom served as legal counsel for the Senate Avenue Young Men's Christian Association, Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association, Indianapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Frederick Douglass Life Insurance Company. He held a number of civic and elected positions. In 1917 he was appointed the Director of the Indiana Colored Food Clubs. He served on the Indianapolis City Council from 1939 to 1942, and as president of Flanner House, a social service agency. He helped found the National Negro Business League and the Marion County Bar Association. Ransom was also an active member of the local Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as a participant in local and national conventions of the church. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias and the Good Citizen's League, serving as its president in 1914.

Freeman and Nettie Ransom had six children: Frank, Frederic, Willard, Robert, Clifford, and A'Lelia (named after Madam Walker's daughter). The Ransom family home was located at 828 N. California St. on the west side of Indianapolis. The surrounding neighborhood was named in honor of Freeman and was designated the Ransom Place Historic District which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. Freeman died of cardiac arrest on 6 August 1947.

Willard B. "Mike" Ransom, 1916–1995

Freeman's son, Willard "Mike", born 17 May 1916, followed in his father's footsteps as a lawyer and civic leader. Willard attended Crispus Attucks High School and completed his undergraduate degree at Talladega College in Alabama. In 1936 he graduated summa cum laude from Harvard Law School and as a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He was drafted into the United States Army during WWII. As a private, he trained as an army pilot at Edgewood Arsenal before being relocated to the chemical warfare division at

Tuskegee Airbase. He was deployed to Belgium and France to the Judge Advocate General's Office.

Following the war, Willard returned to Indianapolis and focused on his career as an attorney and civic activist. He became heavily involved with the Progressive Party, becoming a member of the party's national committee. He headed the Indiana delegation to the 1948 Progressive Party national convention. During the late 1940s and into the early 1950s he served as president of the Indiana chapter of the NAACP where he participated in and led several anti-segregation protests. He also helped draft the Indiana school desegregation law in 1949.

Willard worked as the assistant manager for the Walker Mfg. Co. from 1947 to 1954. Following the resignation of Robert L. Brokenburr, Willard became general manager, serving until 1971, as well as Trustee of the Walker Estate. During his time at Walker Mfg. Co., Willard met his wife, Gladys Williams, whom he married on 6 September 1947. They had two children, Phillip Freeman and Judith Ellen. Following the sale of the Walker Mfg. Co. in 1986, Willard served on the Board of Directors for the Madam Walker Urban Life Center, Inc. (MWULC), a non-profit organization in charge of operating the Walker Building for educational, charitable, and cultural functions.

Among other accomplishments, Willard was integral in the creation of Indiana Black Expo serving as chairperson of the Finance Committee. He became the first African American to serve on the board of the Merchants National Bank and Trust Company, and as a director of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. He was a member of the Marion County Bar Association and was nominated for the Centennial Service Award in 1995. He was a founder of the Concerned Ministers of Indianapolis and served on the board of directors of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. He was involved in the Midtown Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (MEDIC) and Community Action Against Poverty (CAAP) for three decades. At the time of his death Willard served as counsel for the Indianapolis law firm, Bamberger and Feibleman. He died on 7 November 1995.

Walker Manufacturing Company and Walker Building

Born Sarah Breedlove in 1867, Madam C.J. Walker was a successful African American business woman whose business, the Walker Manufacturing Company, created hair care and beauty products for African American women. Walker moved to Indianapolis in 1910. She met Robert L. Brokenburr and Freeman B. Ransom; they helped her incorporate and run her business. The company's headquarters were based in Indianapolis. The Walker Building, located at 617 Indiana Ave., was designed by Indianapolis architectural firm Rubush & Hunter, and was completed in 1927. Aside from serving as the headquarters for the company, the Walker Building was a community cultural center. It housed a casino, beauty shop, coffee shop, drug store, and theater. (The theater was run by the Walker Theater Company, a separate entity from the Walker Manufacturing Company). The use of the building declined after the 1950s and by the late 1970s was nearly abandoned and faced demolition. A group of concerned citizens, including Willard Ransom, formed the Madam Walker Urban Life Center, Inc (MWULC). It was incorporated in 1979 and sought

to restore and revitalize the building as a cultural center. Restoration work began in 1983 and the building officially re-opened in 1988. It continues to serve the community as a cultural arts center. In 1996 the Madam Walker Urban Life Center was renamed the Madam Walker Theater Center. The building is designated a National Historic Landmark and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as the Indiana Register of Historic Sites and Structures.

Sources:

Materials in collection.

Bundles, A'Lelia Perry. *On her own ground: the life and times of Madam C.J. Walker*. New York: Scribner's, 2001.

Latham, Charles. "Madam C.J. Walker Papers (1867–1919) Papers, 1910–1980" Collection guide, Indiana Historical Society, 1993.

Miller, Paige Putnam. "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Madam C.J. Walker Building." National Park Service, 1990.

Warren, Stanley. "Willard B. Ransom: A Life Worth Living," *Black History News and Notes*, August 2001.

Who's Who in Colored America, 1941–1944. New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corp., 1944.

Who's Who in Colored America, 1977–1978. New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corp., 1978.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of the business, civic, and limited personal materials of Freeman and Mike Ransom. Due to the large number of items pertaining to the Walker Manufacturing Company, real estate owned by Madam C.J. Walker, and the Walker Building, separate series for these materials were created.

The collection is organized into seven series:

Series 1: Freeman Briley (F.B.) Ransom, 1912-1994

Series 1 is comprised of papers of Freeman Ransom regarding his civic activities, legal practice, and personal matters. The general correspondence includes issues related to speaking engagements, personal affairs, and church activities. The legal correspondence consist of subjects related to pension claims, real estate, divorces, deaths, and other matters in regards to his law practice. It also includes items to and from Ransom's legal partner, Robert Lee Brokenburr. Correspondence of civic engagement and civil rights includes topics such as the Indianapolis Liberal League, Marion County Republican Committee, and other political topics. Also included is correspondence regarding a rental property located at 972 Colton St. in Indianapolis, owned by Francis and J.H. Brown of Anderson, Indiana. Freeman acted as property manager on behalf of the Browns. There are also materials related to Freeman's wife, Nettie, and to the designation of Ransom Place Historic District.

Series 2: Willard "Mike" Ransom, (1928-2011)

Series 2 contains documents that pertain to Willard Ransom's civic activities, legal practice, personal matters, and speaking engagements. This series includes correspondence, awards and certificates, photographs, speeches, handwritten notes, programs and invitations, legal documents, news clippings, publications on civil rights and race relations, and a large collection of funeral programs and obituaries of Indianapolis residents.

Series 3: Organizations & Programs

Freeman and Willard Ransom worked with many local and national organizations and programs. Series 3 combines correspondence and ephemera from these organizations and are arranged alphabetically by the organization's name. Additionally, correspondence with Madam Walker (or with Freeman on behalf of Madam Walker) pertaining to organizations is included in this series.

Series 4: Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, 1912–1993

The bulk of the collection materials are in Series 4, and they pertain to the Walker Manufacturing Company. General correspondence is arranged chronologically and is comprised of letters addressed to Madam C. J. Walker, as well as correspondence to and from Freeman Ransom, as attorney for the company. The majority of the correspondence pertains to agents ordering and selling of goods, business and legal matters, and individuals soliciting money from Madam Walker and the company. There is also advertising and

marketing correspondence, arranged chronologically. Legal issues that involved specific court cases regarding Walker are separated from the general correspondence and contained within their own folders. Companies with a significant amount of correspondence to the Walker Mfg. Co. were given their own folders and are listed alphabetically. The bulk of these folders contain receipts and invoices.

The series also includes memos, minutes, and handwritten notes by Willard Ransom pertaining to Walker Mfg. Co. Board of Director meetings. These are followed by additional Walker materials regarding trademark registration, beauty conventions, Walker Beauty College, product testing, Walker Trust and sale of the Walker Mfg. Co., and articles and clippings regarding Madam Walker and the business.

The series concludes with the financial records of the Walker Mfg. Co. from 1912 to 1988 and contains invoices, receipts, and order blanks. Orders from agents that were sent to the company through hand-written correspondence are located, chronologically, within the general correspondence. This decision was based on the unique nature of correspondence and the additional content of some of the letters. Also included amongst the financial records are Walker's personal receipts and invoices such as itemized grocery bills, receipts for car repairs, storage of goods, and travel tickets, etc. Many of these records pertain to repairs and storage of Walker's automobiles; the majority are from The Gibson Company in Indianapolis.

Series 5: Walker and Perry Family

Series 5 contains documents relating to the Walker and Perry family. Madam C.J. Walker had one daughter, A'Lelia. A'Lelia adopted Fairy Mae Bryant (Mae Walker) in 1912. In 1927 Fairy Mae married attorney Marion Rowland Perry, Jr., who became proprietor of the Walker Drug Store located in the Walker Building. This series contains correspondence between Marion R. Perry and F.B. Ransom concerning matters of the estate of A'Lelia Walker, including the sale of Villa Lewaro. Also included are reports and financial documents from Perry's travels to Walker Mfg. Co. operations located in Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri and Dallas, Texas.

Following Mae Walker Perry's death in 1945 a series of lawsuits were filed, beginning in 1947, by the Perry family in attempts to gain legal control of the company. Willard Ransom and Robert L. Brokenburr were representatives of the Walker Manufacturing Company during these lawsuits. The settlement arrangements made Fairy Mae and Marion's daughter, A'Lelia Mae Perry Bundles, vice president of the company. Her husband, S. Henry Bundles, was made a general sales manager, and Marion R. Perry became a director. The series is comprised of legal and estate documents, handwritten notes, and financial records pertaining to these lawsuits. Correspondence and financial records of Marion R. Perry regarding the Walker Drug Store are also included.

Series 6: Madam C.J. Walker Real Estate

Series 6 is comprised of documents pertaining to Walker's extensive real estate holdings. Her properties in New York include "Bishop's Court" located in Flushing, Long Island; her townhouse at 108–110 W. 136th Street in New York City; and her Irvington-on-the-Hudson estate, Villa Lewaro. The Villa Lewaro folders include correspondence and invoices regarding the acquisition and construction of the estate, between Ransom and the

architect, Vertner W. Tandy, general contractors Miller-Reed Co., and the real estate representatives, Nail & Parker. The correspondence is sorted into folders representative of those three entities. Some correspondence was between two parties, and in that case, the letters were placed in the folder based on the recipient. For example, a letter from Miller-Reed Co. to Vertner W. Tandy will reside in the Tandy folder. Following the Villa Lewaro folders are letters and invoices regarding other New York properties including 374 Central Park West and 1447-1449 Boston Road in the Bronx. Instances where letters discussed multiple properties (such as 108-110 W. 136th Street and 374 Central Park West) are housed in the general "correspondence regarding Walker real estate in New York" folders. Following the New York properties is correspondence regarding various rental properties in California, Chicago, Indiana, and Ohio. The remainder of the series contains invoices, receipts, and tax documents, which are separated by location. The bulk of these materials are from Indianapolis properties.

Series 7: Madam Walker Urban Life Center/Walker Theater Building, 1956-1995

The final series contains materials related to the Madam C.J. Walker Building and the Madam Walker Urban Life Center, Inc. (MWULC). This series houses documents relevant to the Walker Building, including appraisals. It also contains MWULC correspondence, board minutes, and information about the building restoration, and fundraising efforts.

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