

Collection #
M 0630
OM 0291

CASSIUS M. C. WILLIS PAPERS, 1895–1956

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	2
Contents	3

Processed by:
Wilma L. Gibbs
6 December 1993
Updated 28 January 2005

Manuscript and Visual 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, 3 oversized manuscript folders, 3 photograph folders
COLLECTION DATES:	1895-1956
PROVENANCE:	Jessye Davis Conn, Indianapolis, Ind, 1 February 1993
RESTRICTIONS:	None
COPYRIGHT:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	None
RELATED HOLDINGS:	None
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1993.0214
NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cassius M. Clay Willis was born in Kirkwood, Missouri in 1851. As a young man he moved to Indianapolis. He and his wife, Kate Barnes Willis (1859-1940) had several children. They included Estella (1880), Beulah (1882), Jessie (1884), Adele (1888), twins Arthur and Ada (1893), and Herbert (1894).

Willis founded the C.M.C. Willis Mortuary in 1890. In 1895, he graduated from the Massachusetts School of Embalming. Two of his children worked with him in his business. His daughter, Beulah, worked as an embalmer and his son, Herbert worked as the funeral director, running the business after their father's death in 1920. Though no longer in the Willis family, the mortuary continued to operate at its longtime location, 632 N. Martin Luther King Jr Street until 2009. The former mortuary building is extant and now functions as the leasing office and fitness center for an apartment building which was constructed in 2016.

Willis was a founding member of the local Negro Business League and an officer of the Afro-American Realty Company, an organization designed to improve home and business real estate conditions for blacks.

Sources: Materials in the Collection

Mullins, Paul. "African-American Undertakers in the Circle City." Invisible Indianapolis. <https://invisibleindianapolis.wordpress.com/2017/04/17/african-american-undertakers-in-the-circle-city/>

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of 6 folders and 3 oversized folders. It consists of biographical notes from family genealogical research, information about the Afro-American Realty Company, newspaper advertisements for the Willis Mortuary, and photographs related to the Cassius M. Clay Willis family and the mortuary. More specifically, there are individual photographs of C.M.C. Willis; his wife, Kate Barnes Willis; and their children, Stella Willis Hatch, Adele K. Willis Davis, and Herbert Willis. Additionally, there is a group photograph that includes his granddaughter, Jessye Davis Conn. Also, there are two photographs pertaining to the Willis Mortuary--an exterior view of a frame building that was replaced by the current brick structure located at 632 N. West Street and an interior view of the current structure that includes Paul Haizlip and Herbert Willis. Three oversized folders (OM 0291) contain C.M.C. Willis's 1895 diploma from the Massachusetts School of Embalming; a 1931 Indiana State Board of Embalmers License for the Willis Mortuary; and a biographical pictorial of Herbert Willis.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

Biographical Materials

Massachusetts School of Embalming Diploma

Adele K. Willis Davis

Family Photographs

Herbert Willis Biographical Pictorial

Willis Mortuary

Willis Mortuary

Indiana State Board of Embalmers License

Afro-American Realty Company

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

OM 0291, Folder 1

Visual Collection:
Photographs, Folder 1

Visual Collection:
Photographs, Folder 2

OM 0291, Folder 2

Box 1, Folder 2

Visual Collection:
Photographs, Folder 3

OM 0291, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 3