

Collection #
M 0731

**FLORABELLE WILLIAMS WILSON
COLLECTION, 1910–2001; BULK 1980S**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 manuscript boxes, 1 box of photographs, 1 oversize photograph, 2 artifacts
COLLECTION DATES:	Inclusive, 1910–2001; Bulk, 1980s
PROVENANCE:	Florabelle Wilson, 7507 Brackenwood Circle, N., Indianapolis, IN 46260-5439
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:	1998.0232; 2000.0944; 2005. 0212; 2008.0126
NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Florabelle Williams Wilson (1927–2008) was the daughter of James S. and Hattie Virginia Hollis Williams. 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 College (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 the University of Indianapolis. She was director of the library from 1971 until her retirement in 1982. The first full-time African American faculty member at the 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 served on the Indiana Historical Society Library Committee for nearly two decades. She was a member of the Indianapolis chapter of Zonta International (a women's service organization), Indiana Library Association, and the American Library Association. She was also a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and an elder at Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

While at the University of Indianapolis, 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 also mounted exhibits in conjunction with her West African travels to Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast. She also traveled to France, England, China, Japan, Hong Kong, the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Mexico, and the Caribbean. She presented talks and travelogues to schools, organizations, and historical societies. She created a puppet that she used to present African American history programs to public school districts throughout Marion County. She did 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 the University of Indianapolis 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 spent much of her life working as an educator and librarian. This collection includes material that she collected from various sources over a period of time. Much of the collection pertains to Indianapolis individuals and families, churches, events, and organizations. (The collection contains several photocopies.) Most of the materials remain with their original groupings. These groupings have been arranged alphabetically.

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 5), *A Tiny Spark* and *The Story of the East St. Louis Riot*, were published in 1910 and 1917, respectively. In 1994, 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 8 and Photographs, box 1, folder 3. Lucille Grant taught at IPS School #42. A 1955 yearbook from the school is in box 2, folder 17.

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 17-18 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, WTLF (105.7 FM) presented "A Tribute to Wes Montgomery" at the Convention Center. A copy of the program booklet is in box 1, folder 19. 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 20-22) 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.

The Crystal Rhodes materials (box 1, folder 23) contain correspondence from Rhodes to Wilson, in addition to some clippings of Rhodes' writings for the *California Voice*. Rhodes, Wilson's niece and native of Indianapolis, is a journalist, an author, and a playwright. Her notable works include the *Sin* series, and the plays *Stoops* and *The Trip*.

Box 1, folders 24-42 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 30 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 the University of Indianapolis located on the southside of the city. In 1980, she developed "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew," an exhibit pertaining to black families on the southside (box 2, folder 8, and Photographs, box 1, folder 11-12). Wilson was also involved in the Indianapolis Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the National Council of Negro Women. Materials from these and other various events that Wilson participated in can be found in box 2, folders 1-7.

After extensive renovation, the Madame 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 2, folder 27.

The collection includes several photograph slides. The slides are located in manuscript slides, box 1, bins 1-2. The subjects include: Bishop Anderson and Family, the Hadley Family, Mark Harris, Norman Merrifield, Mt. Paran Baptist Church, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Olivet Baptist Church, St. Mark A.M.E. Church, Second Christian Church, National Council of Negro Women, Indiana Central University Black History Exhibit, Fisk University Glee Club, and Indianapolis Public School #19.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Individual and Family Histories

CONTENTS

Florabelle Wilson

Florabelle Wilson Personal Correspondence

Florabelle Wilson, et al.

Florabelle Wilson Travel

Florabelle Wilson Certificates and Awards

Bishop Anderson and Family, 2 slides

Ashford Family

Christina Moody Briggs publications

Smith Henry Cheatham

Mari Evans

Wilbur Grant Family

Wilbur Grant Family

Hadley Family

Hadley Family, 10 slides

Hampton Family

Margerine Hatcher

Mark Harris, 2 slides

Joseph Holiday

Langston Hughes Family

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 4

Manuscript Slides
Box 1, Bin 1

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 2

Box 1, Folder 5

Box 1, Folder 6

Box 1, Folder 7

Box 1, Folder 8

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 9

Manuscript Slides,
Box 1, Bin 1

Box 1, Folder 10

Box 1, Folder 11

Manuscript Slides,
Box 1, Bin 1

Box 1, Folder 12

Box 1, Folder 13

Lewis Hughes Family	Box 1, Folder 14
Jesse Jackson	Box 1 Folder 15
William M. Johnson	Box 1, Folder 16
Norman Merrifield	Box 1, Folder 17
Norman Merrifield Songs	Box 1, Folder 18
Norman Merrifield Family	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Norman Merrifield Manuscript Slides	Box 1, Bin 1
“A Tribute to Wes Montgomery”	Box 1, Folder 19
Lillian Wallace Collection (1 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 20
Lillian Wallace Collection (2 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 21
Lillian Wallace Collection (3 of 3)	Box 1, Folder 22
Crystal Rhodes	Box 1, Folder 23

Series 2: African-American Churches

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Bethel A.M.E. Church	Box 1, Folder 25
First Baptist Church, West Indianapolis	Box 1, Folder 26
Free Will Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 27
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 28
Immanuel Presbyterian Church	Box 1, Folder 29

Mt. Carmel Baptist Church (City Churches Ushers' Union Convention, 1961)	Box 1, Folder 30
Mt. Helm Missionary Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 31
Mt. Paran Baptist Church	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
Mt. Paran Baptist Church, 1 slide	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 1
Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 32
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 3 slides	Manuscript Slides, Bin 1, Folder 2
New Bethel Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 33
New Garfield Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 34
Olivet Baptist Church (1 of 2)	Box 1, Folder 35
Olivet Baptist Church (2 of 2)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 8
Olivet Baptist Church, 3 slides	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 1
Penick Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion	Box 1, Folder 36
Pleasant Union Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 37
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St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal, 7 slides	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 2
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Second Christian Church	Manuscript Slides Box 1, Bin 2
Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church	Box 1, Folder 40
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Series 3: Events

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Black Writing and Literature Conferences	Box 2, Folder 2
National Council of Negro Women	Box 2, Folder 3
National Council of Negro Women, 1 slide	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 1
United Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church First Annual Commencement, 1975	Box 2, Folder 4
First Annual Gospel Music Excellence Awards, 1982	Box 2, Folder 5
Robinson Community A.M.E. Church Dedication, 1985	Box 2, Folder 6
Indy Jazz Fest, 2001	Box 2, Folder 7
Henricke Photos of Reception	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 11
Unidentified Program Rubric, 3 Columns, characteristic, evaluation.	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 1

Series 5: Art Work, Exhibits and Articles

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Exhibit: "The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew" (1 of 3)	Box 2, Folder 8

Exhibit: “The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew” (2 of 3)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 12
Exhibit: “The Black Family in Indianapolis: Invisible Sinew” (3 of 3)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 13
Exhibit: “Maroon: Black Art and Black History Merge”	Box 2, Folder 9
Exhibit: “Madam C.J. Walker”	Box 2, Folder 10
Exhibit: “This Far by Faith”	Box 2, Folder 11
Indiana Central University Black History Month	Box 2, Folder 12
Indiana Central University Black History Exhibit, 1 slide	Manuscript Slides, Box 1, Bin 2
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J. Macdonald Henry Cards	Box 2, Folder 14

Series 6: Black History

CONTENTS

Black History Articles

CONTAINER

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Lyles Station, Gibson County, Ind., 6 slides

Manuscript Slides,
Box 1, Bin 2

Indiana Avenue

Box 2, Folder 16

Fisk University Glee Club, Tennessee, 1 slide

Manuscript Slides,
Box 1, Bin 2

Series 6: Indianapolis Clowns

CONTENTS

Indianapolis Clowns Baseball Cap and Jersey

CONTAINER

Artifacts:
R2021, R2022

Series 7: Schools

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Indianapolis Public Schools #42 yearbook, 1955

Indianapolis Public Schools #19

Indianapolis Public Schools #19, 1 slide

John Hope School, #26

John Hope School, #26 Commemorative
T-shirt

Crispus Attucks High School

Perry Township High School

Indianapolis Public Schools # 19, 64, 79

CONTAINER

Box 2, Folder 17

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R2763

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Box 2, Folder 21

Series 8: Institutions and Organizations

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Indiana Central University

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Indiana Institute for History and the Arts: An African
American Experience

CONTAINER

Box 2, Folder 22

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Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 16

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Box 2, Folder 24

Box 2, Folder 25

Box 2, Folder 26

Series 8: Walker Theatre

CONTENTS

Walker Theatre Renaissance

CONTAINER

Box 2, Folder 27

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Series 9: Underground Railroad

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CONTAINER

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Levi Coffin House

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Box 1, Folder 17

Underground Railroad in Indiana

Box 2, Folder 30

Series 10: Southside Indianapolis

CONTENTS

CONTAINER

History of Southside Indianapolis

Box 2, Folder 31

Series 10: Groups and Individual Photographs

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CONTAINER

Groups and Individuals- Hadley Family, Cheatham Family,
Miller Family, Mrs. Harriet Kelly, Judge Webster Brewer,
Black Club Federation, Tom Rumer (IHS Library Director),
Alpha Home Residents

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.