

Collection #
M 1362

**RANSOM FAMILY PAPERS
ADDITION, 1920–1995**

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	5
Contents	6

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: **Manuscript Materials:** 1 half-sized manuscript box
Visual Materials: 3 photograph folders, 1 cold storage color photograph folder, 1 OVA photograph folder, 1 OVA graphics folder

COLLECTION DATES: 1920–1995

PROVENANCE: Judith E. Ransom-Lewis, December 2016

RESTRICTIONS: Items listed as being in cold storage need at least four hours to acclimate, so patrons are advised to call ahead of their visit if they wish to view those items to allow for thawing time.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Ransom Family Papers M1200; Madam C.J. Walker Papers M0399; Madam C.J. Walker Papers Addition, M1250; Minnie White Ransom Collection M1141

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2016.0330

NOTES:

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:

Pattillo, Rebecca. "Ransom Family Papers, 1912–2011 [Collection Guide]". Indiana Historical Society, December 2015. <https://indianahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/ransom-family-papers-1.pdf>

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains materials about Willard B. Ransom and the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. Items related to the former include correspondence, newspaper clippings, awards, photographs, tributes, and obituaries. Items related to the latter include newspaper clippings, a 1950 lawsuit between Walker family members and the Walker Company, a photograph of A'Lelia Walker in 1920, and legal agreements with Alex Haley regarding a proposed project on Madam C.J. Walker's life.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

Willard B. Ransom-Biographies, Correspondence, Newspaper Clippings, Awards, and Obituaries, 1943–44, 1964–65, 1968, 1985, 1989, 1995

Newspaper Clippings [Removed from Scrapbook] about Willard B. Ransom's Involvement in NAACP, Progressive Party, Walker Company, and Legal Cases, late 1940s–early 1950s, early 1970s

Mother and Four Children [possibly Ransom Family with Willard Seated on Right], n.d.

Willard B. Ransom Behind Pallbearers, n.d.

Group Photo with Willard B. Ransom in Front of Statue, 26 September 1963

Group Photo with Willard B. Ransom Seated at Desk [Image Printed on Picture Frame], n.d.

A'Lelia Walker [Fragment], 1920

Lawsuit- A'Lelia Mae Perry, Marion R. Perry and Walker Gordon vs. The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company of Indianapolis, 1950

Newspaper Clippings about Madam C.J. Walker and Walker Company, 1931, 1967, 1969, 1976, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1994

Color Magazine Spread on Madam C.J. Walker and Walker Company, December 1946

Walker Company-1965 Walker College Yearbook, *Cé Jé* Bath Oil Coupon, Photo Caption, Various Letterheads, 1965, 1970s–1980s, n.d.

Trustee's Certificate Created by the Last Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, 3 October 1952

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs,
Folder 1 of 3

Photographs,
Folder 2 of 3

Cold Storage
Color Photographs,
Folder 1 of 1

OVA Photographs,
Folder 1 of 1

Photographs,
Folder 3 of 3

Box 1, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 4

OVA Graphics,
Folder 1 of 1

Box 1, Folder 5

Box 1, Folder 6

Walker Estate Correspondence and Agreements with
Alex Haley and Camille Cosby Regarding Proposed
Madam C.J. Walker Project, 1982–83

Box 1, Folder 7

*The Record: The Black Experience in America, 1619–
1979* (Article Published by NAACP, Anti-Defamation
League of B'nai B'rith, and National Council for the
Social Studies), 1979

Box 1, Folder 8