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## BLACKBURN FAMILY PAPERS

MSRC Staff

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BLACKBURN FAMILY PAPERS  
Collection 45-1

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August 1986

MANUSCRIPT DIVISION

## SCOPE NOTE

The Blackburns were a family born into slavery. Francis Randol bore several offspring who were fathered by the slave owner, William Blackburn. He recognized paternity, freed the entire family, transported them out of the south, and continued to support them financially until his death. This collection, documenting this most unusual relationship between slaveowner and his slave family, was donated in 1976 to Howard University by Mrs. Dolly Blackburn (a descendent by marriage). The collection measures 1/4 linear foot and spans the period of 1849-1937.

Although small in size, the collection contains several historical documents of interest.

There are two documents of manumission; one for Francis Randol and her seven children, the other for Robert Blackburn her adult son. A major portion of the materials relate to John R. Blackburn (1841-1927), one of the noted Black educators of nineteenth century. Included are an autobiographical sketch written in 1923, several biographical sketches about John R. Blackburn, correspondence from his father William Blackburn and newsclippings. Also included are a family history, an account of Robert Blackburn's escape from slavery, Francis Randol Blackburn's bank book and several photographs.

## Biographical Sketch

- John R. Blackburn
- 1841 April Born a slave in Essex County, Virginia. Son of Fanny Randol, slave; and William Blackburn, slave owner.
- 1849 Emancipated along with his mother and six sisters and brothers by his father, William Blackburn.
- 1859-1861 Attended Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.
- 1861-1871 Served as Principal of Xenia Public Schools, Evansville, Indiana.
- 1864 Joined the Free and Accepted Masons for the State of Ohio in 1864 in Wilberforce Lodge No. 21, Xenia,
- 1872 Received an Honorary AM Degree from Alcorn University.
- 1873 Became Principal of the Xenia High School, Evansville, Indiana.
- 1875 Married Lottie J. Needham of Xenia.
- 1879 Dec. 23 Lottie Needham Blackburn died.
- 1880 Aug. 9 Married Estelle C. Yates.
- 1883 Received an Honorary AM Degree from Dartmouth College.
- 1884-1891 Served as Trustee of Ohio University, Athens, Ohio.
- 1889 Served as Principal and Instructor of Mathematics in the public school system of Ohio.
- 1917 Became Professor of Mathematics at McCall's Industrial School, Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 1920-1937 Taught Men's Bible Class at Bethel Colored Baptist Church.
- 1926 Retired.
- 1937 Died

Source: Blackburn Family Papers, autobiography of John R. Blackburn and obituaries.  
Box 45-1 Folder 2

## Series Description

- Series A**  
Box 45-1      **Family Papers**  
This series includes correspondence from William Blackburn, a bank book belonging to Francis Randol Blackburn, an account book belonging to John Blackburn and his autobiographical sketch. It also includes an obituary and funeral program of Robert L. Blackburn, son of John R.
- Series B**  
Box 45-1      **Deeds of Emancipation**  
There are two deeds of emancipation one for Francis Randol; the other for her adult son, Robert Blackburn.
- Series C**  
Box 45-1      **Writings about the Blackburns**  
Contains a history of the family and an account of Robert Blackburn's escape from slavery. Most of the materials in this series relate to John R. Blackburn, including news articles, obituaries, a biographical sketch and a history of his association with the Masons.
- Series D**  
Box 45-1      **Photographs**  
This series contains photographs of the Blackburn family members, including a daguerreotype of William Blackburn.

## Container List

### **Series A: Family Papers**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| Box  | Folder  |
| 45-1 | 1 Francis (Fanny Blackburn) Bankbook ca. 1849   |
|      | 2 John R. Blackburn. Autobiographical sketch, 1923  |
|      | 3 John R. Blackburn. Account book kept at Dartmouth, 1857-1860                                      |
|      | 4 John R. Blackburn. Correspondence from William Blackburn, Oct. 13, 1860                           |
|      | 5 Dolly Townsend Blackburn, wife of Robert L. Blackburn. Autograph book, Livingstone College, 1920s |
|      | 6 Robert L. Blackburn, son of John R., obituary and funeral program                                 |
|      | 7 Edna Townsend Schmidt, sister of Dolly Blackburn., obituary and funeral program                   |

### **Series B: Deeds of Emancipation**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | 8 Francis (Fanny) Randol and her seven children (photostat), 1849 |
|  | 9 Robert Blackburn, 1849  |

### **Series C: Writings about the Blackburns**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | 10 The Blackburns: "An American Family"   |
|  | 11 John R. Blackburn. Biographical Sketches   |
|  | 12 John R. Blackburn. "John R. Blackburn"   |
|  | 13 John R. Blackburn. "Negro Educator Wins Title of Teacher Emeritus"               |
|  | 14 John R. Blackburn. "Retired Negro Educator 95, Still Active"                     |
|  | 15 John R. Blackburn "Six Languages Spoken"   |
|  | 16 John R. Blackburn. Obituaries  |
|  | 17 John R. Blackburn. History of his association with the Masons (Includes picture) |
|  | 18 Robert Blackburn. "The Escape of Robert Blackburn" (xerox)                       |

### **Series D: Photographs**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  | 19 John R. Blackburn   |
|  | 20 William Blackburn   |
|  | 21 Mrs. John R. Blackburn                                      |
|  | 22 Mrs. John R. Blackburn, sisters and mother                  |
|  | 23 Children of John and Estell Blackburn: Will, Carrie and Rob |
|  | 24 Robert Blackburn  |
|  | 25 Robert L. Blackburn, son of John R.                         |

Container List

<b>Series D:</b>	<b>Photographs continued</b>	
Box	Folder	
45-1	26	Dolly Blackburn
	27	Charles Blackburn, brother of John R.
	28	Caroline Pinneo Blackburn
	29	Unidentified man
	30	Unidentified man
	31	Unidentified woman
	32	Unidentified group of women