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The Davidson Family Collection
Collection 207-1

Prepared by:
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June 2002

Scope Note

The Davidson Family Collection provides important documentation of the literary, religious, inventiveness, educational, and civil rights struggles of African Americans in Washington, D.C. from about 1895 to the 1950s. The collection was donated by Edmonia Davidson in 1973, and measures .5 linear foot.

Included are materials related to husband and wife, Edmonia and Shelby Davidson, and their son, Eugene. Additionally, and of special importance are the detailed minutes of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association recorded by Shelby Davidson from 1905 to 1906. This organization was established in 1895, and regularly featured speakers on issues concerning African Americans. The speakers were mainly African Americans prominent in their fields, including Nannie Helen Burroughs, Garnet Wilkinson, Archibald H. Grimke, Kelly Miller, Governor P.B.S. Pinchback, and many others. In most cases, the minutes reflect in some detail the content of the speeches and the ensuing discussions that followed.

Shelby James Davidson (1868-1930), lawyer, activist, inventor, and realtor, was president of the Howard University General Alumni Association, and executive director of the D.C. Branch of the NAACP. He also served as president of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association. Included in this collection is his 1908 patent for a paper rewind mechanism for adding machines.

The writings of Eugene Davidson (1896-1976), civil rights activist and realtor (he preferred the latter description of himself as opposed to Realtor®), include his testimony before the United States Commission on Civil Rights regarding housing in the District of Columbia.

Scope Note continued

He describes the Aannoyances@ (a cross burning on his lawn, repeated attempted deliveries of products he had not ordered, etc.) he and his wife endured while he served as president of the D.C. Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1939, he served as administrator of the New Negro Alliance. Davidson, too, was president of the Washington Real Estate Brokers Association, and the General Alumni Association of Howard University. With Howard University professor Kelly Miller and others, he fiercely fought the presidency of Mordecai W. Johnson. Davidson served as editor of the special Howard University alumni association issue, AThe Case Against President Mordecai W. Johnson,@ published in 1937.

Sources: Papers of Shelby Davidson and Papers of Eugene Davidson in the Manuscript Division of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

See also: The Records of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association in the Manuscript Division.

Series Description

Series A

Box 207-1

Shelby Davidson

Contains Shelby's 1908 patent, a 1910 legal brief, and original handwritten minutes of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association (1905-1906).

Series B

Box 207-1

Eugene Davidson

Includes some correspondence, his testimony before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and a New Negro Alliance Year Book, 1939.

Series C

Box 207-1

Rolled Photographs

Container List

Series A

Box

207-1

Shelby Davidson

Folder

- 1 Anniversary note, 1905
- 2 Greeting card from Davidson & Son Real Estate
- 3 Letter to the editor
- 4 Writings by Shelby Davidson
- 5 Legal brief for appellee by James A. Cobb and Shelby J. Davidson in the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia. The W.W. Kimball Piano Company, a Corporation, Appellant, vs. Jacob B. Williams, Appellee, 1910
- 6 1908 patent for a paper rewind mechanism for adding machines
- 7 Original handwritten minutes (and photocopy) of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, 1905-1906, Shelby J. Davidson, president
- 8 The American Negro Academy Annual Address. AThe Ultimate Criminal,@ by Archibald H. Grimke, 1915

Series B

Eugene Davidson

- 9 Chronology of Annoyances at the House of Davidson, 1957, including photograph
- 10 1937 Howard University special issue of alumni journal
- 11 Correspondence to chairman, Commissioners= Council on Human Relations from Julius W. Hobson, et al, 1958
- 12 Testimony before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
- 13 New Negro Alliance Year Book, First Edition, 1939
- 14 Other printed material

Series C

Rolled Photographs

Howard University Law Department, First Year Class, February 1, 1923

The Provisional Officers= Reserve, Training Regiment, Fort Des Moines, Iowa, July 28, 19175