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INVENTORY
OF THE
REVELLA E. HUGHES PAPERS

Manuscript Collection (**Ms 91**)

Special Collections Department
James E. Morrow Library
Marshall University
Huntington, West Virginia
1985

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REVELLA E. HUGHES PAPERS, 1895-1984

Accession Number: 410

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This collection consists of photo reproductions of the pages from Miss Hughes' press book, the original of which is located in the Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. The copies were the gift of Miss Hughes in October, 1984.

Linear feet of shelf space: ½ feet.

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CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE COLLECTION

This collection of Revella E. Hughes papers consists of photo reproductions of the pages of her press book pertaining to her career in New York and on tour. Original pressbook located in the Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University. Later accession includes holograph arrangements for the organ; research papers written while a graduate student at Northwestern University, where Dr. Hughes earned a Masters of Music degree in 1942. Newspaper clippings comprise the bulk of the collection. Also included are programs and announcements of concerts, recitals, and other musical events in which Miss Hughes participated. The newspaper clippings and programs encompass the range of Miss Hughes' performing career, beginning at Hartshorn Memorial College in Richmond, Virginia, in 1909, and include items about her most recent appearance, in Charleston, West Virginia, in October, 1984.

Correspondence is scattered in the collection, the bulk of it dating from 1932 until 1941, the period when Miss Hughes returned to Huntington, West Virginia, to become supervisor of public school music for the then-segregated Negro schools.

Certificates include diplomas and citations for various civic and community activities. There are also several photographs.

REVELLA EUDOSIA HUGHES, 1895-1987

A musician and performer whose repertoire ranges from classical to jazz, Revella Hughes began developing her talent under the tutelage of her mother in Huntington, West Virginia. Born July 27, 1895, to George and Anna B. Page Hughes, Miss Hughes began piano lessons at age five. Although she began school in Huntington, she transferred to her mother's alma mater, Hartshorn Memorial College, in Richmond, Virginia, and received her diploma for completion of the course in music in 1909. She then attended Oberlin High School in Oberlin, Ohio, graduating in 1915. While at Oberlin, Miss Hughes took courses in the Conservatory and began choral work that was to prove the foundation of her later career. She sang with the high school girls' choir, the Oberlin Musical Union and the First Methodist Church choir. She also played violin in the high school orchestra and composed a rally song for the high school.

From Oberlin, Miss Hughes went to Howard University in Washington, D. C., where she studied voice and piano. Upon receipt of her bachelor of music degree in 1917, she remained in Washington to teach at the Washington Conservatory of Music for one year. She then became director of music at Orangeburg State College in South Carolina, while continuing to perform in a series of concerts and recitals.

By 1920, Miss Hughes was in New York, studying voice under George Bagby. During this period she developed her repertoire and appeared with such artists as Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson. A highlight of the early period in New York was Miss Hughes' appearance as principal soloist at the Mayor Hylan Peoples' Concerts in September 1921 in Central Park. She was the first person of her race to be so featured. While a student of Walter Kiesewetter, voice coach for Metropolitan and Chicago Opera singers, Miss Hughes also performed for the New York City Police Department Police band banquet at the Hotel Astor in May 1922. She also recorded on W. C. Handy's black Swan record label.

In 1923, Miss Hughes' career took a radical departure when she was offered a contract to become the choral director for the Broadway production of "Shuffle Along," featuring the music of Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle. She went on tour with the road company to major cities, including Chicago and Saint Louis. This change in career effected a change in her personal life as well, ending the marriage she had contracted in 1920 with Layton Wheaton, a New York dentist she had met at Howard when they were both students. From the road company of "Shuffle Along," Miss Hughes accepted the lead in "Runnin' Wild," and toured with that show through 1925. In addition to the theater, she also performed on the radio, beginning in 1923 on WHN, New York, and appeared at motion-picture houses as part of the live entertainment. Notable among these presentation-house appearances were her performances on the B. F. Keith circuit in Huntington, West Virginia, and at Chicago's Regal Theater. By 1930, after appearing in "Hot Rhythm" at

New York's Colonial Theater, she had formed the Four Bon-Bons, a quartet comprised of Georgette Harvey of "Runnin' Wild" and "Porgy," Musa Williams, and Lois Parker. The Bon-Bons had the distinction of appearing on nationwide Columbia Broadcasting System broadcasts where their race was not mentioned. They were also singled out to participate in an experimental television broadcast.

The Depression ended the golden years of the Harlem Renaissance that had injected black music and literature into the mainstream of American culture. This period also brought about another major shift in Miss Hughes' career. In 1932, she returned to Huntington to take care of her widowed mother in her last illness. Over the objections of some townspeople who decried her show-business associations, she secured the position as supervisor of public school music in the then-segregated schools. She created the band at Douglass High School, and took her young musicians out into the community, where they performed at major civic events and for white civic groups. After placing first in the West Virginia High School Music Contest (Negro) for three consecutive years, her high school musicians won a permanent trophy. In less than ten years, Miss Hughes had transformed a non-existent music program into one that won state-wide recognition. She also found time to complete a master's degree in music at Northwestern University.

At the death of her mother, Miss Hughes returned to New York to develop yet another phase in her career. Declaring that she had "left her voice with her students back in Huntington," she perfected and toured with "An Informal Hour of Music," on the Hammond organ, a program that summarized her musical career. Beginning with several classical pieces, she then gave a jazz treatment to light classical numbers, added some Latin-American rhythms, and ended with compositions by Duke Ellington, Fats Waller and W. C. Handy. Playing primarily in supper clubs on the East Coast, she made several appearances in West Virginia. A highlight of this period was in 1953 when she toured Europe and the Middle East with the Gypsy Markoff she for the U. S. O. She served as arranger for the group in addition to performing on the organ.

Miss Hughes retired from full-time performing in 1955. After a twenty-five year hiatus, she was "re-discovered" and brought out of retirement by the Universal Jazz Coalition for the Women's Jazz Festival in New York in 1980. She then began a new round of appearances: she appeared at the marble Collegiate Church, Saint Peter's Church Jazz Festival, Radio City Music Hall and the American Museum of Natural History, all in New York. She also performed for the Baldwin-Hammond Company in New Jersey and for the benefit of scholarships at the Palm Beach Junior College in Florida. In 1984 she gave concerts in Los Angeles, California, and at the West Virginia Black Culture Festival in Charleston, West Virginia. Miss Hughes also continued to garner honors. She was named distinguished alumna by Howard University in 1984 and received an honorary doctorate of music from Marshall University in 1985.

She continued to visit West Virginia, participating in the 1986 Douglass High School reunion in Huntington. She died in New York City on October 24, 1987, at the age of ninety-one years. In 1988, she was inducted posthumously into the Huntington, West Virginia, Wall of Fame.

REVELLA E. HUGHES PAPERS. 1895-1984.

- | | | |
|-------------|--|------------------|
| Fd 1 | Preliminary Papers | 2 items |
| | Photograph of Miss Hughes, undated.
Birth Certificate, 1895. | |
| Fd 2 | Education - Hartshorn Memorial College, Richmond Virginia | Pp. 1-2 |
| | p. 1 Diploma, 1909
p. 2 Program, School of Music, 1909 | |
| Fd 3 | Education - Oberlin High School, Oberlin, Ohio | Pp. 3-11 |
| | p. 3 Diploma, 1915
p. 4 Photograph
Portions of programs for Oberlin Musical Union
p. 5 Program, Public School concert, 1915
Note from Ernest G. Yocum, undated
p. 6 Programs, Oberlin Musical Union and Oberlin High School
p. 7 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Hughes from Oberlin High School, 1914
November / J. C. Seeman, principal
p. 8 Class photograph, 1915
p. 9 Orchestra photograph
p. 10 Group photograph
p. 11 Group photograph
Commencement announcement | |
| Fd 4 | Education - Howard University, Washington, D. C. | Pp. 12-26 |
| | p. 12 Diploma, 1917 - bachelor of music
p. 13 Letter to Professor Tibbs from Rosa K. Jones, Hartshorn Memorial
College, Richmond, Virginia, 1917 March 23
p. 14-15 Programs, Huntington, W. Va., 1912
Programs, Howard University, 1915, 1916
p. 16 Program, Washington Concert Orchestra, 1916
p. 17 Program, Howard University, 1917
p. 18 Program, Hartshorn Memorial College, 1917
p. 19 Programs, Howard University, 1916, 1918
p. 20 Program, Washington Art Association, 1918
p. 21 Programs, Zion Baptist Church and First Baptist Church, 1918
p. 22 Program, undated
p. 23-24 Class Photograph | |

p. 25-26 Program, Howard University Women's Club, 1945

Fd 5 Education - Northwestern University

Pp. 27-31

- p. 27 Diploma, 1942 - Master of Music
- p. 28 Program, Northwestern University School of Music, 1937
Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated
- p. 29 Program, Northwestern University School of Music, 1940
- p. 30 Program, Northwestern University School of Music, 1940
- p. 31 Program, Northwestern University School of Music, 1941
Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated

Fd 6 Concerts, Recitals, etc.

Pp. 32-59

- p. 32 Program, Garnett Auditorium, 1918
- p. 33 Program, West Virginia Collegiate Institute, 1918
- p. 34 Programs, Cleveland, Ohio, undated; Williamson, W. Va., 1918
- p. 35 Programs, Hampton Institute, undated; Newark, New Jersey, 1920
- p. 36 Programs, Huntington, W. Va., undated, 1918, 1945
- p. 37 Programs, Church of the Crucifixion, 1921; State College Choral Club, 1919
Newspaper clipping, Bluefield State College; undated
- p. 38 Programs, Clarendon Training School, undated; War Camp Community Service,
1919
Announcement, Jerusalem Baptist Church, 1919
- p. 39 Program and announcement, Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York City, 1919
- p. 40 Program, Chapel of St. Simon the Cyrenian, 1920
Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated (Roland Hayes concert)
- p. 41 Program, Jordan Hall, 1920 (with Marian Anderson)
- p. 42 Program, Hampton Institute, 1920
Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated
- p. 43 Program, St. Mark's M. E. Church, 1921 (with Marian Anderson)
- p. 44 Programs, Jackson School of music, New York City, undated; Child's Welfare
Recreation Center Benefit, undated (with Paul Robeson)
- p. 45 Letter, New York City, 1920 April 24 / Harry T. Burleigh
- p. 46 Newspaper clippings, Washington, D. C., undated; *The Crisis*, 1921;
unidentified, undated
- p. 47 Newspaper clippings, Louisville, undated; Huntington, W. Va., 1921;
unidentified, undated
- p. 48 Program and announcement, Union Baptist Church, Morristown, N. J., 1922
- p. 49 Programs, Black Star Line Band Concert, undated; Dextra Male Chorus,
New York City, 1924
- p. 50-51 Programs, First Baptist Church, 1926; Howe College, 1927; Second Baptist
Church, 1927; unidentified, undated

Fd 6 Concerts, Recitals, etc. cont'd

- p. 52 Programs, Grace Presbyterian Church, 1923 (with Eubie Blake, Noble Sissle, et al.); Berean Baptist Church, 1927
- p. 53 Announcement, Oakland, California, NAACP, 1927
- p. 54 Program, Oakland, California, 1927
- p. 55 Programs, unidentified place, 1920; Mt. Olive C. M. E. Church, 1928
- p. 56-57 Program, unidentified, undated;
Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., ca, 1918
- p. 58 Program, Cleveland, Ohio, undated
- p. 59 Testimonial, undated / Joseph H. Douglass

Fd 7 "This and That"**Pp. 60-100**

- p. 60 "Remarkable Revella," *The Light* 4,42 (September 8, 1928); title page
- p. 61-62 "Is Revella Hughes' Brown Face Cheating Her of Fortune," Pittsburgh *Courier* [no year] April 12;
Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1926; undated
- p. 63 Note, Washington, D. C., 1916 November 11 / Carrie Watson
- p. 64 Announcement, invitation, The Mayor Hylan Peoples' Concerts, New York City, 1921
- p. 65 Program, The Mayor Hylan Peoples' Concerts, 1921
- p. 66 Photograph, Police Band Dinner, Waldorf-Astoria, 1922
- p. 67 Newspaper clippings, Chicago, St. Louis, undated
- p. 68-69 Newspaper clippings, New York, 1922; New Haven, 1922; Wheeling, W. Va. 1924
- p. 70 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., undated;
Note, Orpheum Theater, Huntington, W. Va., 1926 April 17 / James T. Dunbar
- p. 71 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1927; undated
- p. 72 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1928; undated
- p. 73-74 Newspaper clipping, Chicago, 1937
- p. 75 Newspaper clippings, [Chicago], 1937;
Invitation, Douglas League of Women Voters Garden Party, 1937 (Fletcher Henderson, accompanist)
- p. 76 Newspaper clippings, Pittsburgh, 1947; New York, undated
- p. 77 Photograph, Bata chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, Huntington, W. Va., ca. 1937
- p. 78 Photograph, Roy Campenella and NAACP award, 1953
- p. 79 Photograph, Revella Hughes and Hammond chord organ, undated
- p. 80 Newspaper clippings, Newark, N. J., undated; New York, 1953; Chicago, 1950
- p. 81 Newspaper clippings, New York, undated; Baltimore, undated; unidentified place, 1948 (some as "Carmella Desche")
- p. 82 Newspaper clippings, *People's Voice*, 1946

Fd 7 "This and That" cont'd

- p. 83 Newspaper clippings, Troy, N. Y., 1948
- p. 84 Newspaper clippings, New York, 1949
- p. 85 Newspaper clippings, Baltimore, 1952; unidentified, undated
- p. 86 Newspaper clippings, Washington, D. C., 1952
- p. 87 Newspaper clipping, unidentified, undated
- p. 88 Newspaper clippings, Cleveland, Undated; New York, 1949

- p. 89 Newspaper clippings, Charleston, W. Va., 1954; *The Afro-American*, 1954
- p. 90 Newspaper clippings, Philadelphia, 1958; Pittsburgh, 1957; New York, 1954; *The Afro-American*, 1954
- p. 91 Program, S. S. Independence, 1956
- p. 92 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1958
- p. 93 Clippings, "It's a Woman's World," *Essence* (undated), p. 24; advertisement for Revella Hughes on Black Swan Recording label, 1920's
- p. 94 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., undated
- p. 95 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1967
- p. 96 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1967
- p. 97 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., undated (after 1967)
- p. 98 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1969
- p. 99 Certificate, Salvation Army, undated
- p. 100 Certificate, Outstanding Community Service, Sachs Quality Stores, Inc., and WWRL-radio, undated

Fd 8 Show Business - Theater, 1923-1930**Pp. 101-117**

- p. 101 Newspaper clippings, Richmond, Va., 1923, 1925: "Shuffle Along" and "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 102 Newspaper clippings, Boston, 1923, 1925: "Shuffle Along" and "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 103 Program, "Runnin' Wild," undated
- p. 104 Newspaper clipping, Boston, 1923: "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 105 Newspaper clippings, Philadelphia, 1924; unidentified, undated: "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 106 Newspaper clippings, Chicago, 1928: presentation house appearances
- p. 107 Newspaper clippings, Chicago, undated; unidentified, undated: "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 108 Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated: presentation house appearances
- p. 109 Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated
- p. 110 Announcements, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1924; Pittsburgh, undated
- p. 111 Newspaper clippings, Pittsburgh, 1928: presentation house appearance
- p. 112 Newspaper clippings, Chicago, 1928: presentation house appearance
- p. 113 Program, "Hot Rhythm," New York, 1930; Newspaper clipping, "Swing Along," undated

- p. 114 Newspaper clippings, unidentified, undated: "Runnin' Wild"
- p. 115 Newspaper clippings, New York, undated: "Runnin' Wild;" New York, 1930;
"Hot Rhythm"
- p. 116 Program, Alhambra Theater, undated
- p. 117 Telegram, Huntington, W. Va. 1930 Aug 22 / "Mom"
Telegram, New York, 1930 Aug 21 / "Brownie"

Fd 9 Show Business - Keith Appearances Pp. 118-125

- p. 118 Newspaper clippings, announcement, Huntington, W. Va., undated
- p. 119-124 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., undated
- p. 125 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1926; Ironton, Ohio, undated

Fd 10 Show Business - Radio Pp. 126-133

- p. 126 Newspaper clipping, New York, 1924: WHN-radio
Note, WHN radio, New York, 1924 January 7 / N. T. Granlund
- p. 127-128 Listeners' responses, New York, 1923
- p. 129 Telegram, New York, 1924 January 4 / N. T. Granlund
Telegram, Metropolitan Hotel, 1954 April 19 / "Wells"
- p. 130-133 Listeners' responses, New York, 1923, 1924; Philadelphia, 1924
Telegram, New York, 1923 December 4 / N. T. Granlund

Fd 11 Show Business - The Bon Bons Pp. 134-143

- p. 134-137 Newspaper clippings, radio schedule, undated
Note, New York City 1923 January 3 / N. T. Granlund
- p. 138 Newspaper clipping, St. Louis *Argus*, 1931
- p. 139-140 Article, "Garvey's Dream Inspiration of Glorious Musical Comedy
Revue," *Lafayette Low-Downs*, 1931 June 27
- p. 141 Photograph, the Bon Bons
- p. 142 Newspaper clipping, Philadelphia, 1931: A'Lelia Walker funeral
- p. 143 Page from VanVechten book re: A'Lelia Walker funeral

Fd 12 Teaching - Certificates Pp. 144-146

- p. 144 West Virginia Provisional High School Certificate, 1942-43
- p. 145 Letter of appointment, Policy Committee on the Study of West Virginia Teacher
Education, Music Committee, 1937
- p. 146 Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority membership certificate, undated

Fd 13 Teaching - Newspaper Clippings and Programs**Pp. 147-179**

- p. 147 Newspaper clipping, [1932?]
Letter, Huntington, West Virginia to Superintendent H. A. Rice, 1932
April 21 / J. H. Long
- p. 148 Newspaper clippings, 1936; undated: World Day of Prayer, American Business Club, Marshall College, Ebenezer Methodist Church, West Virginia High School Music Contest
- p. 149 Newspaper clippings, undated: Douglass High School Hi-Y Revue, "Cyclone Sally," One-act plays, "Cleopatra"
- p. 150 Newspaper clippings, undated: "Cleopatra," Salvation Army, Veteran's Hospital
- p. 151-152 Program, "A Tale of Old Japan," 1937
- p. 153 Newspaper clippings, 1937, undated: "A Tale of Old Japan," Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, Veterans Hospital
- p. 154 Newspaper clippings, undated: Lions Club, Marshall College, "The Magic Beanstalk," "A Christmas Carol," Community Center opening
- p. 155 Newspaper clippings, undated: Kiwanis State Convention, Relief stations, Dixieland Minstrel and Revue, PTA eye-glass fund
- p. 156 Newspaper clippings, 1937, undated: Relief stations Christmas benefit
- p. 157 Newspaper clippings, 1937: "A Tale of Old Japan," West Virginia High School Music Contest
- p. 158 Newspaper clippings, 1937, 1942: "Seven Last Words of Christ"
- p. 159 Newspaper clippings, 1938, 1939: West Virginia State High School Music Contest, Simms PTA, Navy Day parade
- p. 160 Newspaper clippings, 1939: American Business Club, Kiwanis Club, Chamber of Commerce, PTA eye-saving fund, Enslow Junior High School
- p. 161 Newspaper clippings, 1940, undated: Ad Club, Negro benefit, Dixie-Land Minstrel, First Methodist Church, West Virginia State High School Music Contest, Marshall athletic banquet
- p. 162 Newspaper clippings, 1940, undated: Twentieth Street Baptist Church, Radio Center
- p. 163 Newspaper clippings, 1940, undated: Festival of Negro Music, Veterans Hospital, Life Underwriters' Association, First Baptist Church of Kenova, Douglass-Gary football game, William Tell column
- p. 164 Certificate, 1940: Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks appointment of Miss Hughes as Grand State Band Directress, West Virginia
- p. 165-166 Program, undated: Christmas Festival of Negro Music
- p. 167 Newspaper clippings, 1940, 1941: Mother's Day, Hughes recital, Northwestern lecture, Music Week concert
- p. 168 Newspaper clippings, undated: PTA eye-glass fund, First Baptist Church, Wiatt Smith column, "Going Back Stage with the Scribe"
- p. 169-170 Program, undated: "Seven Last Words of Christ"
- p. 171 Newspaper clippings, 1928, undated: May Festival of Negro Music, "Seven Last

Words of Christ”

- p. 172 Newspaper clippings, undated: Relief Stations, PTA eye-glass fund, Kiwanis State Convention, Dixieland Minstrels and Revue
- p. 173 Newspaper clippings, undated: “O Hara San,” Max Bailey, “Seven Last Words of Christ”
- p. 174 Newspaper clipping, undated: West Virginia State High School Music Contest
- p. 175 Douglass High School publication page, undated
- p. 176 Newspaper clippings, undated: Dixieland Minstrels, May Festival of Music
- p. 177-178 Douglass High School reunion publication, undated
- p. 179 Photograph, undated: Douglass orchestra

Fd 14 Teaching - Correspondence**Pp. 180-219**

- p. 180 Huntington, W. Va., 1932 December 19 / Mayor George D. Bradshaw
- p. 181 Cammack Junior High School, 1933 March 9 / Kathleen LeMaster
- p. 182 National Mattress Company, 1933 May 2 / C. F. Edwards
- p. 183 Charleston, W. Va., 1936 January 18 / Dr. Dennis E. Smith
- p. 184 Tri-State Area Council, Boy Scouts of America, 1936 February 22 / G. F. Walker
- p. 185 Cabell County Public Schools, 1936 April 16 / H. H. Frankel
- p. 186 Cabell County Board of Education, 1937 March 2 / Olin C. Nutter
- p. 187-190 W. Va. State Department of Education, 1937 March 17 / I. J. K. Wells
- p. 191 Cabell County Public Schools, 1937 March 17 / R. B. Marston
- p. 192 W. Va. Governor’s Office, 1937 March 17 / Homer A. Holt
- p. 193-194 Huntington, W. Va., 1937 March 21 / Percy W. Cook
- p. 195-196 Huntington, W. Va., 1937 March 22 / Mrs. R. B. Marston
- p. 197-198 Huntington, W. Va., 1937 March 22 / Claren Peoples
- p. 199-200 Huntington High School, 1937 March 31 / Alta C. Heinz
- p. 201 Cabell County Public Schools, 1937 April 18 / Olin C. Nutter
- p. 202 High School Players Association of W. Va., 1937 April 19 / F. S. Belcher
- p. 203 Huntington Lions Club, 1937 April 20 / T. Smith Brewer
- p. 204 American Business Club, 1937 May 24 / Ernest S. Allie
- p. 205 W. Va. State Board of Education, 1938 March 15 / David Kirby
- p. 206 W. Va. Governor’s Office, 1938 March 15 / Homer A. Holt
- p. 207 Marshall College, 1938 March 20 / Roy C. Woods
- p. 208 Cabell County Public Schools, 1938 March 21 / R. B. Marston
- p. 209-210 Music Supervisor, Cabell County Schools, 1938 March 30 / Claren Peoples
- p. 211 Huntington Pageant Association, Inc., 1939 Oct. 12 / Lucie G. Lewis and Mary E. Clelland
- p. 212-213 Chamber of Commerce, 1939 December 27 / W. S. Rosenheim
- p. 214 Chamber of Commerce, 1940 May 13, W. S. Rosenheim
- p. 215 Music Supervisor, Cabell County Schools, 1940 Nov. 13 / Claren Peoples
- p. 216 W. Va. State College, 1940 Nov. 25 / Paul J. Moore
- p. 217 Douglass High School, 1941 Jan. 28 / H. D. Hazlewood

- p. 218 Huntington, W. Va., 1941 May 12 / R. A. Schoew
 p. 219 Huntington Kiwanis Club, 1941 Oct. 9 / Emmons B. Lytle

Fd 15 Defense Department, 1953

Pp. 220-232

- p. 220 Photograph: Gypsy Markoff and group
 p. 221 Announcement: U. S. O. Camp Show
 p. 222 Itinerary, Gypsy Markoff show
 p. 223-228 Cast summary and biographies
 p. 229 Letter: Headquarters, Northern Air Materiel Area, USAF, 1953 Sept. 30 / Major Marion G. Rehfluss
 p. 230 Certificate, U. S. O.
 p. 231 Certificate, Department of Defense, 1953
 p. 232 Letter: Department of the Army, 1954 Feb. 3 / Major Gen. Wm. E. Bergin

Fd 16 Organ

Pp. 233-246

- p. 233 Press release, "The Informal House of Music"
 p. 234-235 Program, "An Informal Hour of Music," 1953-54 season
 p. 236 Newspaper clippings, Newark, N. J., undated; New York, 1953; Chicago, 1950
 p. 237 Newspaper clipping, Hartsdale, N. Y., 1955
 p. 238 Articles, Jet, August 27, 1953;
 newspaper clippings, New York, undated
 p. 239 Newspaper clippings, Cleveland, 1950; New York, undated
 p. 240 Newspaper clippings, announcements, Troy, New York, New York City, undated
 p. 241 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1953
 p. 242-243 Program, "An Informal Hour of Music," Bluefield State College, 1954
 p. 244 Newspaper clipping, Oak Hill, W. Va., 1954
 p. 245 Announcement, "An Informal Hour of Music," Long Island, undated
 p. 246 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1953, 1964

Fd 17 Out of Retirement - Women's Jazz Festival

Pp. 247-252

- p. 247 Program, 1980
 p. 248 Newspaper clippings, *New York Times*, *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, 1980
 p. 249 Announcement, 1981
 p. 250 Program, 1981
 p. 251 Announcement, undated
 p. 252 Newspaper clippings, Huntington, W. Va., 1980

Fd 18 Out of Retirement - Kiwanis Club of New York Pp. 253-254

- p. 253 Certificate of appreciation, 1980
- p. 254 Article, *The Gong*, Oct. 3, 1979: appointment as Honorary Entertainment Chairperson

Fd 19 Out of Retirement - Marble Collegiate Church Pp. 255-263

- p. 255 Program cover, 1981
- p. 256 Announcement, dinner-concert sponsored by Men and Women of Marble, 1981
- p. 257-258 Program, "An Hour of Informal Interpretations," 1981
- p. 259-260 Program, "An Evening with Revella Hughes," 1982
- p. 261 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1982
- p. 262 Newspaper clipping, *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, 1982
- p. 263 Newspaper clipping, *Harlem Weekly*, 1982

Fd 20 Out of Retirement - Baldwin-Hammond Music Center Pp. 264-267

- p. 264-265 Announcement, Totowa, New Jersey, 1982
- p. 266-267 Program, "An Hour of Informal Interpretations," 1982

Fd 21 Out of Retirement - Arthur Bramwell Mapp Scholarship Pp. 268-270

- p. 268 Letter, Mapp Scholarship Fund, Inc., 1982 August 24 / Gwendolyn C. Mapp
- p. 269 Invitation to luncheon honoring Revella Hughes et al., 1982
- p. 270 Citation; autographed by Congressman Charles B. Rangel

Fd 22 Out of Retirement - Belle Glade, Florida Pp. 271-271

- p. 271 Newspaper clipping, Belle Glade, Florida, 1982
- p. 272-273 Newspaper clippings, [Florida, 1983]
- p. 274 Newspaper clipping, Lake Okeechobee *Evening Times*, 1983
- p. 275 Newspaper clipping, Lake Okeechobee *Post*, 1983

Fd 23 Out of Retirement - St. Peter's Church Pp. 276-282

- p. 276 Newspaper clipping, *New York Times*, 1983
- p. 277 Announcement, 1983
- p. 278 Newspaper clipping, Huntington, W. Va., 1983
- p. 279 Announcement, 1984
- p. 280-281 Program, All Nite Soul, St. Peter's Jazz Ministry, 1984
- p. 282 Newspaper clipping, *New York Daily News*, 1984

Fd 24 Out of Retirement - Radio City Music Hall Pp. 283-288

- p. 283-285 Program, Community Service Society recognition ceremony, 1983
- p. 286 Letter, Community Service Society, 1983 Nov. 8 / James Sugarman
- p. 287 Article, *Press Times*, Winter 1984
- p. 288 Letter, Community Service Society, 1984 April 30 / James Sugarman

Fd 25 Out of Retirement - American Museum of Natural History Pp. 289-290

- p. 289 Letter, 1984 May 8 / Marcia White, Coordinator, African and African American Programs
- p. 290 Announcement, 1984: "Lafayette Theater Revisited"

Fd 26 Out of Retirement - Los Angeles Trade Technical College P. 291

- p. 291 Program, Vernon Library Friends benefit, 1984: "An Hour of Informal Music"

Fd 27 Out of Retirement - West Virginia Black Cultural Festival, 1984 Pp. 292-301

- p. 292-301 Program, Charleston, W. Va., 1984

Fd 28 Out of Retirement - Howard University Pp. 302-313

- p. 302 Envelope, Moorland-Springarn Research Center, 1983 Jan.
- p. 303 Letter, Moorland-Springarn Research Center, 1983 January 26 / Thomas C. Battle
- p. 304 Letter, Moorland-Springarn Research Center, 1983 February 15 / Clifford L. Muse
- p. 305 Letter, Howard University Alumni Club, New York City, 1984 January 20 / Alice M. Dear
- p. 306-309 Program, Howard University Alumni Clubs...Salutes the Arts, 1984 March
- p. 310 Letter, Department of Music, 1984 April 3 / Doris McGinty
- p. 311 Letter, Department of Music, 1984 May 17 / Doris McGinty
- p. 312 Article, Howard University Alumni News, July 1984
- p. 313 Citation, Distinguished Alumna, Howard University, 1984

Fd 29 Addenda (Original Items)

1. Invitation, College of Fine Arts, Marshall University, reception, May, 1985
2. Commencement program, Marshall University, May 1985