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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

Processed By: Cora P. Teel; word-processed document prepared by Amanda Quait, 1998.

Date Completed: June, 1985

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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.

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

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

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- 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