William Henry Richards Papers
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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2016
Revised 2016 October

Contact information:
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http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms015012

LC Online Catalog record:
http://lccn.loc.gov/mm2015085978

Prepared by Kathleen O'Neill
Collection Summary
Title: William Henry Richards Papers
Span Dates: 1856-1946
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1895-1930)
ID No.: MSS85978
Creator: Richards, William Henry, 1856-1941
Extent: 1,000 items ; 4 containers plus 2 oversize ; 1.7 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Summary: Lawyer, educator, and librarian. Correspondence, legal files, financial files, printed matter, and clippings relating to Richards's career as a lawyer and professor and law librarian at Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People
Miller, Kelly, 1863-1939.
Nelson, Julia B., 1842-1914.
Norwood, John C., 1859-1927.
Powell, Holland, 1854-1924.
Richards, William Henry, 1856-1941.
White, Jaretta, 1853-1935.

Organizations
Bethel Literary and Historical Association of Washington, D.C.
Howard University. Law Department.
Niagara Movement (Organization)

Subjects
Affidavits--Washington (D.C.)
African American educators--Washington (D.C.)
African American lawyers--Washington (D.C.)
African Americans--Civil rights.
African Americans--Economic conditions.
African Americans--Education (Higher)
African Americans--Societies, etc.
African Americans--Washington (D.C.)
Civil rights movements--United States.
Civil rights--Societies, etc.
Civil rights--United States.
Deeds--Washington (D.C.)
Fraternal organizations.
History--Societies, etc.
Insurance policies--Washington (D.C.)
Literature--Societies, etc.
Practice of law--Washington (D.C.)
Real property--Minnesota.
Real property--Tennessee.
Real property--Washington (D.C.)
Stocks--Washington (D.C.)
Temperance.
Administrative Information

Provenance
The papers of William Henry Richards, lawyer, educator, and librarian, were transferred from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division in 2015.

Copyright Status
Copyright in the unpublished writings of William Henry Richards in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions
The papers of William Henry Richards are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation
Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, William Henry Richards Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1856, Jan. 15</td>
<td>Born, Athens, Tenn., to free parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Orphaned, raised by his grandmother, Hannah Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Attended Society of Friends mission school, Athens, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873-1876</td>
<td>School teacher, Mt. Harmony, Tenn., and Society of Friends mission school, Athens, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Attended Warner Institute, Jonesboro, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Entered Howard University, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Graduated valedictorian, Howard University, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1885</td>
<td>Clerk, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Received L.L.M. from Howard University Law School, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Returned to Athens, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Admitted to Tennessee bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Elected delegate to congressional and state Republican Party conventions, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-1888</td>
<td>Elected town alderman, Athens, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888-1889</td>
<td>Elected mayor, Athens, Tenn. First African-American mayor of a town below the Mason-Dixon Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-1890</td>
<td>Clerk, United States Post Office, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Professor of international law, law of evidence, and personal property, Law Department of Howard University, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-1891</td>
<td>Clerk, Interior Department, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Admitted to bar of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia on the motion of William Henry Harrison Hart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-1908</td>
<td>President, Howard University Union Alumni Association, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1900</td>
<td>President, Bethel Literary and Historical Association of Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Completed a study of the professional income of Howard University Law School alumni, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Granted permission to argue before the Supreme Court on the motion of Mason N. Richardson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Norwood v. Francis, decision gave married women in the District of Columbia the right to be a partner in a joint stock company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941, Jan. 27</td>
<td>Died, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scope and Content Note**

The papers of William Henry Richards (1856-1941) span the years 1856-1946 with the bulk of material dating from 1895 to 1930. William Henry Richards, born to free parents in 1856, was a lawyer and, for thirty-eight years, a professor of law at Howard University. Richards was one of only a handful of African-American lawyers practicing in Washington, D.C., at the turn of the twentieth century. His papers document his career as a lawyer and professor and his work with the Bethel Literary and Historical Association of Washington, D.C. and the Niagara Movement (precursor to the National Association...
for the Advancement of Colored People). The collection includes correspondence, legal and financial papers, biographical materials, pamphlets, and magazines.

The wills, deeds, and affidavits generated through his law practice provide a glimpse into the relationships, finances, and holdings of African Americans in Washington, D.C., from the late 1890s through the 1930s. The account ledgers and receipts include entries for clients such as William Henry Harrison Hart, Kelly Miller, John C. Norwood, and Holland Powell. In addition, stock, share, and insurance certificates and rare printed matter provide a record of African-American financial, fraternal, and literary organizations.

The collection also contains records of Richards's real estate holdings in Tennessee, Minnesota, and Washington, D.C. Richards inherited property from Jaretta White and most notably, Julia B. Nelson, a suffragist and schoolteacher from Minnesota. Richards worked with Nelson in a Quaker school in Tennessee circa 1875. She loaned him money to finance his college education and bequeathed him the bulk of her estate when she died in 1914. Account ledgers, correspondence, and writings detail their friendship and shared interest in women's suffrage and the temperance movement.

Richards's professional career at Howard University is documented through printed matter including Howard University Department of Law prospectus brochures, a copy of the Howard University General Alumni Association constitution, and issues of *The Blue Ribbon Magazine*. Writings, books, and law course materials document Richards's intellectual pursuits.

Correspondents include family members, Howard University faculty and students, and clients. Although the correspondence is primarily incoming, some of the correspondence includes outgoing drafts.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged alphabetically by name of person or organization, subject, or type of material.
## Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| BOX 1     | Account ledgers, 1884-1915  
            | (4 folders)   |
| BOX 1     | Account receipts, 1896-1919  
            | (2 folders)   |
| BOX 1     | Affidavits, 1895, 1907, undated  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 1     | Bank books, 1906, 1941  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 1     | Bar admissions and law licenses, 1887-1891, 1903  
            | See also Oversize, same heading  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 1     | Bethel Literary and Historical Association of Washington, D.C., 1895-1900  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 1     | Books, 1856, 1870-1873, 1880-1886, circa 1905  
            | See also Oversize, same heading  
            | (3 folders)   |
| BOX 2     | Correspondence, 1898-1913, 1922-1940, undated  
            | (3 folders)   |
| BOX 2     | Crispus Attucks Relief Association, 1903-1910  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 2     | Deeds, 1902, 1910-1917, undated  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 2     | Estate, 1941-1946  
            | (2 folders)   |
| BOX 2     | Forms, blank legal and bank, undated  
            | (5 folders)   |
| BOX 2     | Funeral, 1941  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 2     | Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers, 1898  
            | See also Oversize, same heading  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 2     | Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1879, 1890-1902, 1912-1918, 1929, undated  
            | See also Oversize, same heading  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 3     | Insurance, life and property, 1900-1935  
            | (2 folders)   |
| BOX 3     | Jones, Mary B., 1929-1930, 1938  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 3     | Legal studies course material, undated  
            | (2 folders)   |
| BOX 3     | Medical, 1912-1913  
            | (1 folder)   |
| BOX 3     | Nelson, Julia B.  
            | Correspondence, 1898, 1901-1908  
            | (1 folder)   |
William Henry Richards Papers

Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|           | Real estate, Red Wing, Minn., 1908  See Box 3, Real Estate, Red Wing, Minn.  
(1 folder) |
|           | Writings, 1894-1905  See also Oversize, same heading  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | Niagara Movement, 1905-1906  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | Norwood, John C. and William H., 1906, 1921-1927, undated  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | Printed matter, 1888, 1904-1906, 1929, 1937  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | Real estate  
  McMinn County, Tenn., 1900, 1909-1925  
  (1 folder)  
  Red Wing, Minn., 1908-1921  
  (1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | Receipts, 1901-1911, 1921-1926, 1935-1938  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | The Washington Colored American, clipping, 1922, Mar. 27  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 3     | White, Jaretta, 1918-1935  
(1 folder) |
| BOX 4     | Wills and probate, 1899, 1906, 1915-1937  
(4 folders) |
| BOX 4     | Writings, 1903, undated  See also Oversize, same heading  
(4 folders) |
| BOX 4     | Oversize, 1856-1929  
(4 folders) |
| BOX 1     | Bar admissions and law licenses  
  Certificate, admittance to the Bar of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, 1891  
  (Container 1)  
  Certificate, admittance to the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1903  
  (Container 1) |
| BOX 1     | Books  
  Atlas Designed to Illustrate the Geography of the Heavens, 1856 (Container 1) |
| BOX 1     | Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers  
  Certificates, 1898 (Container 2) |
| BOX 1     | Howard University  
  Resolution and certificates, 1914-1915, 1929 (Container 2) |
| BOX 1     | Nelson, Julia B.  
  Writings  
| BOX 1     | The Washington Colored American, 1922, Mar. 27  (Container 3) |
| BOX 1     | Writings  
  Biographical notes, handwritten, Undated (Container 4) |