

William Henry Richards Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2015085978>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms015012>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2015
Revised 2023 July

Collection Summary

Title: William Henry Richards Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1856-1946

Bulk Dates: 1895-1930

ID No.: MSS85978

Creator: Richards, William Henry, 1856-1941

Extent: 1,000 items

Extent: 4 containers plus 2 oversize

Extent: 1.7 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2015085978>

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 LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Hart, William Henry Harrison, 1857-1934.

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.
Universities and colleges--Washington (D.C.)
Wills--Washington (D.C.)
Women--Suffrage.

Places

United States--Social conditions--19th century.
United States--Social conditions--20th century.
Washington (D.C.)--Economic conditions.
Washington (D.C.)--History.
Washington (D.C.)--Social conditions.
Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

Occupations

Educators.
Lawyers.
Librarians.

Acquisition Information

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

Processing History

The papers of William Henry Richards were arranged and described by Kathleen O'Neill in 2015. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

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

| Date | Event |
|---------------|---|
| 1856, Jan. 15 | Born, Athens, Tenn., to emancipated parents |

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

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 emancipated 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

| Container | Contents |
|-----------|---|
| 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 <i>See also Oversize, same heading</i> (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 <i>See also Oversize, same heading</i> (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 <i>See also Oversize, same heading</i> (1 folder) |
| BOX 2 | Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1879, 1890-1902, 1912-1918, 1929, undated <i>See also Oversize, same heading</i> (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) |

Container List

| Container | Contents |
|-----------|--|
| | Real estate, Red Wing, Minn., 1908 <u><i>See Box 3, Real Estate, Red Wing, Minn.</i></u> (1 folder) |
| | Writings, 1894-1905 <u><i>See also Oversize, same heading</i></u> (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 | <i>The Washington Colored American</i> , clipping, 1922, Mar. 27 (1 folder) |
| BOX 3 | White, Jaretta, 1918-1935 (2 folders) |
| BOX 4 | Wills and probate, 1899, 1906, 1915-1937 (4 folders) |
| BOX 4 | Writings, 1903, undated <u><i>See also Oversize, same heading</i></u> (4 folders) |
| BOX OV 1 | Oversize, 1856-1929 |
| BOX OV 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 OV 1 | Books <i>Atlas Designed to Illustrate the Geography of the Heavens</i> , 1856 (Container 1) |
| BOX OV 1 | Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers Certificates, 1898 (Container 2) |
| BOX OV 1 | Howard University Resolution and certificates, 1914-1915, 1929 (Container 2) |
| BOX OV 1 | Nelson, Julia B. Writings "A Remarkable Career of a Remarkable Man," <i>The Colored American</i> , Washington, D.C., 1900, Oct. 20 (Container 3) |
| BOX OV 1 | <i>The Washington Colored American</i> , 1922, Mar. 27 (Container 3) |
| BOX OV 1 | Writings Biographical notes, handwritten, Undated (Container 4) |