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Katherine Bell Banks Papers

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1926-1960

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Consists of letters from Du Bois to various members of the Bell family, the earliest written in September 1926 to Katherine Bell and the latest written in December 1960 to Thomasina Bell Fitzroy. These letters offer a unique perspective of Du Bois's personal life.

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Background on Katherine Bell Banks

Katherine Bell Banks was born to Thomas Bell, M.D., and Pearl Bell in 1912. They moved from their home in Tennessee to Brooklyn, New York in 1916. There they shared a two family house with W.E.B. Du Bois and his family. Dr. Bell and Dr. Du Bois developed a strong friendship during this time and the families remained close for years. The Bells settled in Newark, New Jersey in 1922. Dr. Du Bois remained a frequent guest in the Bells' house, and was godfather to the Bells' youngest daughter, Thomasina.

Katherine enrolled at Montclair University in 1929 after her graduation from Barringer High School in Newark. She received her B.A. in French in 1934 and a year later entered Columbia University where she obtained her M.A. in French. Banks taught at Talladega University in Alabama for seven years and then returned to her alma mater, Barringer High School. She retired from Newark's Vailsburg High School in 1980.

Scope of collection

The Bell collection consists primarily of fifteen letters and one telegram, all written by Du Bois to various members of the Bell family. The earliest was written in September 1926 to Katherine Bell and the latest was written in December 1960, three years before Du Bois's death, to Thomasina Bell Fitzroy.

These letters offer a unique perspective of Du Bois. Banks writes, "He was seen as a complicated and controversial figure. He seemed austere-and by his own evaluation shy and unrevealing about his private life." She continues, "Lacking is much information about his circle of friends-close friends that is. His letters help to fill that void."

The collection also includes two photographs and an invitation to Du Bois's seventieth birthday celebration at Atlanta University. The photographs feature Yolande Du Bois in her high school graduation dress and the Du Bois and Bell families at their home in Newark, New Jersey.

Inventory

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell

1926 Sept 18

Box 1: 1

Wishing Katherine lots of rest, play, and candy; written when Du Bois was in Russia.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell

1937 Dec 14

Box 1: 1

Explaining he is unable to provide Katherine transportation north for the holidays.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell

1939 June 22

Box 1: 1

Confirming the time of his arrival for dinner.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell

1941 Mar 27

Box 1

Confirming that a letter of recommendation was sent on her behalf to Tennessee State College and advising her to rethink her choice of school.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell

1941 Nov 26

Box 1: 1

Inviting her to subscribe to Phylon publication.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell

1943 Apr 21

Box 1: 2

Accepting his invitation to Easter dinner.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell

1943 May 4

Box 1: 2

Expressing thanks for hosting previous Sunday's family gathering.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell
1945 Nov 30
Box 1: 2
Noting his return from Europe and the health of Mrs. Du Bois.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell
1946 June 27
Box 1: 2
Expressing his sympathy upon the death of Dr. Bell.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell
1947 Feb 3
Box 1: 2
Extending his greetings and saying that he is on his way "South and West."

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell
1949 Mar 22
Box 1: 3
Canceling his dinner appointment because he has to attend a "Peace Conference."

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell
1949 May 22
Box 1: 3
Greetings from the French Riviera, with regards to Katherine's mother and sister.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Thomasina Yolande Bell Fitzroy
1949 June 2
Box 1: 3
Congratulating her on her recent wedding.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell
1950 Sept 18
Box 1: 3
Greetings upon his recent return from Czechoslovakia and France.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Thomisina Yolande Bell Fitzroy
1960 Dec 23
Box 1: 3
Catching up on recent family events, and expressing his desire to get together in the future.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Telegram to Bell family
undated
Box 1: 3
Instructing the Bells to expect Du Bois on December 24th at three o'clock.

Invitation
1938 Feb 23
Box 1: 4
Seventieth Birthday celebration honoring W.E.B. Du Bois, Atlanta University.

Photograph: Yolande Du Bois
1918
Box 1: 5
Photographs: Bell and Du Bois families,
1944
Box 1: 5

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Purchased from Katherine Bell Banks in October 2004.

Processing Information

Processed by Matthew Hansbury, December 2004.

Digitized content

All material in the collection has been scanned and are available online through our digital repository, Credo.

Related Material

Letters in this collection were published in the following book by Katherine Bell Banks describing her family's relationship with W.E.B. Du Bois:

Banks, Katherine Bell and Robert C. Hayden. *William E.B. Du Bois, Family and Friendship: Another Side of the Man*. Littleton, Mass.: Tapestry Press, Ltd., 2004.

For materials related to W.E.B. Du Bois, see:

W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, 1803-1979.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

Digitization of the Banks Papers was funded by grants from the Verizon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Cite as: Katherine Bell Banks Papers (MS 429). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

African Americans--History--1877-1964.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963--Correspondence.

Contributors

Banks, Katherine Bell [main entry]

Banks, Katherine Bell.

Bell, Thomas, d.1946.

Genres and formats

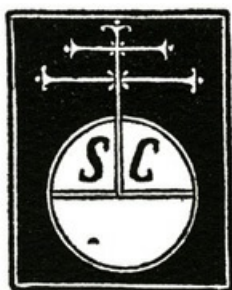
Letters (correspondence)

Photographs.

Link to similar SCUA collections

African American

Du Bois, W.E.B.



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