Guide to the Martha Gayle Collection, BCMS.0050

Finding aid prepared by Demar Ludford, Archives Intern
with assistance from Diana Bowers-Smith, Archivist

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit
September 05, 2018
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## Summary Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>Brooklyn Public Library - Brooklyn Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Gayle, Martha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Martha Gayle Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1902-2001; bulk 1960-1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>2.62 Linear feet, 6 document boxes [5 Letter size, 1 legal]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Brooklyn Collection Morgue, Shelves 11.1 and 11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Various documents relating to the life, work, and activities of Martha Adina Gayle dating from 1902 -2001. Gayle was a Jamaican immigrant who came to the United States in 1924.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preferred Citation**

This collection should be cited as the Martha Gayle Collection, Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection.
Biographical Note

Martha Adina Gayle was born in the parish of St. Elizabeth in the district of Cambridge on the island of Jamaica on October 22, 1902. According to her birth records, she was the daughter of Olivia and Richard Gayle. On April 16 1924, Martha traveled to the United States of America on board the S.S. Alegria from Port Antonio, Jamaica, landing six days later on April 22nd with her final destination being Brooklyn, New York. Records listed Martha’s occupation as a domestic worker and that she was not married.

Having established a good footing in the United States, Martha Gayle was able to accommodate and help her niece Daisy May Parnell, who lived with her in Brooklyn for many decades. Martha was also very helpful to her family in Jamaica with correspondence records indicating that she often helped out in whatever way she could. On April 15, 1947 Martha became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America. For the next few decades, Martha lived in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn where she started out renting and eventually owned three apartment buildings at 164 MacDonough Street, 51 MacDonough Street and 285 Macon Street. It was through the rental income those properties provided that Martha was able to transition from domestic work to self-employment as a landlord.

Martha was a very active and longstanding member of the Siloam Presbyterian church as well as a women’s missionary group. In the latter years of her life, Martha had several health issues and was in and out of the hospital. Records indicate that she had serious health issues in the year 2000 and at one point was living in a hospice. She passed away in 2000 at approximately 98 years old.

Scope and Contents

The materials in this collection are largely textual and contain records such as correspondence, medical documents, and identification papers. There are also records relating to Gayle's niece Daisy Parnell, as well as Arnold Austin, another relative. A large part of the collection consists of financial records that speak to her activities as a landlord such as banking, legal, insurance, and utilities records. The collection also includes photographs and ephemera.

The richest section of this collection is the extensive correspondence between Martha Gayle, Daisy Parnell, and their friends and family back home. While many of their correspondents’ full names are unknown, their communications nonetheless provide an understanding of the relationship that Martha and Daisy both had with their families and friends. Correspondents include Martha’s sister Edith Gayle, her onetime employer Addie Place, and many others.
Arrangement

The collection is comprised of six boxes of records that are arranged in eight series by type.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Brooklyn Public Library - Brooklyn Collection, 2018

Access

This collection is located in the Brooklyn Collection at Brooklyn Public Library’s Central Branch at Grand Army Plaza. The collection may only be used in the library and is not available through interlibrary loan. Requests to view the collection must be made at least 48 hours in advance of visit.

Use

While many items in the Brooklyn Collection are unrestricted, we do not own reproduction rights to all materials. Be aware of the several kinds of rights that might apply: copyright, licensing and trademarks. The researcher assumes all responsibility for copyright questions.

Provenance

The Martha Gayle Collection was donated to the Brooklyn Collection in January 2016 by George Camarda, who purchased Martha Gayle's home after her death and found these materials stored in the basement.

Related Materials

Brooklyn Clippings Files, folders: Bedford-Stuyvesant (1960-1989) and West Indian Americans

Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York, N.Y.)
- Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)

Personal Name(s)

- Parnell, Daisy M.
## Collection Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 1: Identification Records, 1902-1947</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folder 2: Medical Records, 1956-2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 3: Personal Notes, 1955-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 4: Notebook/Ledger, 1987-1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 5: Address Books, 1961-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 6: Arnold L. Austin Passport, 1949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This item is in fragile condition.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 7: Bank Books, 1940-1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folder 8: Car Repair Fines and Bills, 1963-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 9: Con Edison Bills, 1952-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 1: Gas Bills, 1970-2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 2: Legal Documents, 1946-1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 3: Savino Heat and Oil Bills, 1979-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 4: Tax Documents, 1945-1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 5: Telephone Bills, 1971 (Jan - March)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 7: Arnold Austin Tax Return, 1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 8: Invoices, Bank Statements, and Receipts, undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 1 [oversize]: Invoices, Receipts and Bank Statements, 1945-1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 2 [oversize]: Insurance Documents, 1948-1998</td>
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</table>

**Series 3: Properties, Box 6 [oversize]**
Folder 3: 51 MacDonough Street, 1941-1990

Folder 4: 164 MacDonough Street, 1942-2001

Folder 5: 285 Macon Street, 1915-2001

Series 4: Correspondence, Box 2

The folders in this series are arranged by the sender’s name. In some cases, only the sender’s first name is known.

Folder 9: Addie Place, 1947-1949

Addie Place was at onetime Martha Gayle’s employer and sold her the house at 164 MacDonough Street.

Folder 10: Aunt Ross, 1967-1969

Folder 11: Austin, R., 1944-1945

Martha Gayle's sister.


Martha Gayle's niece.

Folder 13: Cliff to Arnold L. Austin, 1963-1972
Cliff is Martha Gayle's nephew.

Folder 14: Cliff to Daisy Parnell and Martha Gayle, 1961-1994

Folder 15: Edna, 1978-1986


Folder 17: Gayle, Edith, 1952-1975

Edith Gayle is Martha’s sister, and Daisy Parnell’s mother.

Folder 18: Gayle, Martha, 1963-1993

Folder 19: Graham Family, 1993-

The Graham Family correspondence comes from grandnieces and grandnephews of Martha Gayle.

Folder 20: June (includes photograph), 1979-1994

Martha Gayle's niece.
Martha Gayle's niece.

Folder 2: Luc, 1948-1987

Martha Gayle's niece.

Folder 3: Miller Family, 1972-1996

The Miller Family correspondence comes from grandnieces and grandnephews of Martha Gayle.

Folder 4: Parnell, Daisy, (February 1981- May 1981)

Daisy Parnell is Martha Gayle’s niece who lived with her for many years. She is also Edith Gayle’s daughter.

Folder 5: Reynolds, Julius, 1978-1979

Folder 6: Rowe, D., 1977-1979

Folder 7: Ruby, 1969-1995

Martha Gayle's niece.

Folder 8: Stokely, 1986-1988

Folder 9: Sue, 1931-1976
Folder 10: Sender Unknown [arranged by date]

Folder 11: Single Letters

Folder 12: Undated Correspondence

Folder 13: Greeting Cards

Folder 14: Official Correspondence

Box 6, Folder 6 [oversize]: Envelopes

Series 5: Photographs, Box 3

Folder 15: Photographs of Martha Gayle

Folder 16: Photographs of Daisy Parnell

Folder 17: Individual Portraits

Series 5: Photographs, Box 4

Folder 1: Group portraits

Folder 2: Children
## Series 6: Church Documents, Box 4

- **Bibles & Birthday Card in Portfolio**

- **Folder 3: Books and Pamphlets**
  - Box 6, Folder 7 [oversize]: Leaflets and Letters
  - Box 6, Folder 8 [oversize]: Siloam Presbyterian Church

## Series 7: Ephemera, Box 4

- **Folder 4: Calendars**

- **Folder 5: Sheet Music**

## Series 7: Ephemera, Box 5

- **Folder 1: New York World’s Fair 1964/65 Guidebooks**
- **Folder 2: Programs and Books**
- **Folder 3: Booklets and Flyers**
- **Folder 4: Prints and Stamps**
Folder 5: Non-personal Photographs and Postcards

Folder 6: Scrapbook Materials

Folder 7: Funeral Programs, 1972-1992

Included is a program for Edith Gayle, Martha Gayle's sister and Daisy Parnell's mother, which has a family photograph tucked inside.

Folder 8: Church Documents, 1949-1978

Folder 9: Correspondence, 1998

Folder 10: Educational Documents, 1960-1971


Folder 12: Identification Documents, 1945-1957

Folder 13: Medical Documents, 1955-1980

Folder 14: Official Correspondence, 1945-2001

Folder 15: Tax Documents, 1949-2000
Folder 16: Water Bills, 1975-1979