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Finding Aid for the Burgess Beverly Family Scrapbook digital collection Collection 513

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Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Prepared by Rachel Burns, Tim Gloege, Julie Tabberer, and Ruth VanStee

Grand Rapids History Center

Grand Rapids Public Library

111 Library Street NE

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Business Number: 616-988-5497

localhis@grpl.org

URL: <https://www.grpl.org/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History Center
Source - dnr:	VanStee, Ruth
Source:	Burgess, Julia
Source:	Harrison, Margaret
Title:	Burgess Beverly family scrapbook
ID:	Collection 513
Date [inclusive]:	1852-1997
Physical Description:	0 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The Burgess Beverly Family Scrapbook documents two African American families who lived Grand Rapids, Michigan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The best-known member of this family was Hattie Beverly, the first woman of color to teach for the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Additionally, the scrapbook documents Bishop John Burgess who was the first African American to head an Episcopal diocese. The scrapbook mostly contains photographs as well as newspaper clippings and correspondence. The scrapbook is owned by the family of Bishop John Burgess, the son of Hattie's sister Ethel (Beverly) Burgess. This scrapbook would be beneficial to researchers interested in Hattie Beverly and learning more about African American history in Grand Rapids.

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Biographical Note for John Beverly

John Beverly was born in Virginia in 1842. Beverly was listed as a free person, due to his Native American mother's status. At age nine, he moved into Franklin County, Ohio after changes to Virginia law would affect his freedom status. During the Civil War, he was a personal servant for a Union officer. After the war, census records show that he worked in

hotels in Indianapolis and Milwaukee. It was in Milwaukee where he met and married Minnie Rusink, the oldest daughter of a Dutch immigrant family, in 1871.

John and Minnie moved to Grand Rapids in the mid-1870s. In Grand Rapids, their family grew to five daughters and one son. His children were Mabel Beverly (1872-1893), Hattie Beverly (1847-1904), Minnie Beverly (1876-1920), Ethel Beverly (1878-1950), and John B. Beverly (1884-1910). The family lived on Union Ave near the edge of the city. Beverly worked as a butcher, processing cattle and poultry he purchased from neighboring farmers. His business was successful and the family thrived, owning several plats on Union Avenue and participating in the cultural events and groups in the African American community in the city.

In 1899, John and Minnie Beverly divorced. Minnie Beverly passed away in 1902 while John resided in Ypsilanti, MI. In 1911, he moved back to Grand Rapids and lived with his daughter Ethel Beverly and her family until his death in 1926. The tuberculosis scourge at that time caused there to only be a few survivors in his large family including Ethel Beverly's family.

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Biographical Note for Ethel Beverley Burgess

Ethel Inez Beverly was born in Grand Rapids in 1878. After graduating from high school, she attended the Grand Rapids Kindergarten Training and received her certificate in June 1900. According to her son, John Burgess, she did not have many opportunities to teach kindergarten. In 1904, she married Theodore Burgess from Cincinnati, Ohio. They raised two sons, Theodore Jr. and John.

Ethel Beverly Burgess played a crucial role in the small African American community in Grand Rapids. She participated in a survey from the Episcopal church to gauge interest in a church for people of color. The Burgesses were founding members of St. Philips church. This church was described as the first "colored episcopal congregation" in the state. She served as a major capital fundraiser for the current St. Philips building located on Henry Avenue and Sherman Street. During the first World War, she volunteered on the home front with the Red Cross. Burgess served as a community chairwoman in food conservation and wartime gardening, training black women in canning and preserving foods. In 1927, she was involved in the Interracial Council, on a committee charged with addressing the "recreational needs of young colored people" unwelcome in organizations like the YMCA.

Ethel outlived all of her siblings who died of tuberculosis, most before they were 30. After her husband died in 1936, Ethel lived with her son John in Ohio. Later she moved in with her son Theodore, Jr. living in California. She passed away in California in 1950, but was buried in Grand Rapids.

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Biographical Note for Theodore Burgess

Theodore Thomas Burgess was born in Mt. Healthy, Ohio in 1877 to Melville and Lillian Burgess. He was the oldest in the family of six children. As a young adult, he moved to Cincinnati, and worked as an elevator operator. He moved on to be employed as a messenger to a federal circuit court judge and followed him up to Grand Rapids. There he met Ethel Beverly.

Burgess found work as a porter for the Pere Marquette Railroad and at times, in the local hotels. He participated in the work of the Negro Welfare guild and the Interracial Council, planning public events and discussions. As an officer of the Council, he assisted with Dr. W.E.B. Dubois visit to Grand Rapids. He was a principal speaker for the Missionary Union meeting at Grace Episcopal church 1934, giving a speech titled "The Episcopal Church and the Negro."

Burgess died in 1936 at the age of 58. In addition to the immediate family, he was survived by two of his sisters, Mayme and Viola, and his mother, Lillian, in Mt. Healthy, Ohio.

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Biographical Note for Hattie Beverly Robinson

Hattie Jeanette Beverly Robinson was born in 1874 to John and Minnie Beverly in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her family moved to Grand Rapids when she was a young child.

She graduated from the Grand Rapids High School (now Central High) in 1895 with an emphasis in Preparatory English. In 1897 Beverly Robinson became the first African American to enter the teacher cadet training program from the Grand Rapids Public School system. She became the first African American hired as a teacher in the Grand Rapids Public Schools in 1899.

Beverly Robinson taught at Congress Elementary for three years until she married Major Robinson 1902. They had one child, Ethel Robinson. Similarly to many of her siblings, Hattie Beverly Robinson also contracted tuberculosis. She died in 1904 at age 30 while seeking treatment in New Mexico. Her daughter Ethel was legally adopted by friends, the Leftage family, who eventually moved to New York City.

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Biographical Note for Bishop John Burgess

John Melville Burgess was born in 1909 to Ethel and Theodore Burgess. He spent his formative years in Grand Rapids at St. Philips Church. After completing his education at Central High School, he attended the University of Michigan, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology.

He went on to study at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduating in 1934. After ordination, he returned to Grand Rapids as a priest at St. Phillips, the church where his parents were founding members. He then became the vicar of the Mission of St. Simon of Cyrene in Woodlawn, Ohio. Burgess married his wife Esther Taylor in 1945. They would go on to have two children, Julia Burgess and Margaret Harrison.

Bishop Burgess served as the Howard University Chaplain in Washington, D.C 1946 to 1956. He then became a canon at Washington Cathedral from 1951 to 1956. In 1956, he served as archdeacon and superintendent of the Episcopal City Mission.

In 1962 he was elected as a suffragan bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. He was then elected as the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts in 1969 until his retirement in 1975. After his retirement he became a professor at Yale University's Divinity School. Burgess passed away in 2003.

These biographical notes were written by Ruth Vanstee and Rachel Burns. Sources for these notes include census records, *Grand Rapids Press* and *Grand Rapids Herald* articles, vital records, correspondence from the scrapbook itself, and published obituaries for Bishop John Burgess from the Boston Globe and New York Times.

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Content Description

This scrapbook is made up of photographs, correspondence, and newspaper clippings relating to the Burgess Beverly Family. The earliest materials are from the mid 1800s and span through the 1990s.

Each page of the scrapbook has multiple items. When using the digital collection, researchers can view each object with a detailed description. The descriptions for the materials were derived from a conversation between Bishop John Burgess and his daughters Julia Burgess and Margaret Harrison as they looked through the scrapbook in 1997. Additional research was conducted by Ruth VanStee, a volunteer of the Grand Rapids History Center, who

originally connected Burgess and Harrison to the Grand Rapids History Center and digitized the scrapbook.

Researchers interested in early African American families in Grand Rapids, St. Philips Episcopal Church, and the legacy of Hattie Beverly would benefit from utilizing this collection.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

This digital collection is open to all researchers.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This material was digitized by Ruth VanStee. Permission to host the digital surrogates was provided by Julia Burgess and Margaret Harrison, 2022.023

Existence and Location of Copies

As of April 2024, this digital collection is hosted on the [Grand Rapids Public Library digital collections site](#).

Existence and Location of Originals

The original scrapbook is maintained by the Burgess Family.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- scrapbooks
- digitized images
- African Americans -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- family papers
- Beverly, Hattie, 1874-1904
- Burgess, John, 1909-2003
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Church history
- St. Philip's Episcopal Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.)--Church history
- VanStee, Ruth
- Burgess, Julia
- Harrison, Margaret