The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

135th Street Branch records

1905-1951
Sc MG 219

Summary

Creator: New York Public Library. 135th Street Branch

Title: 135th Street Branch records

Date: 1905-1951

Size: 2.8 linear feet (6 archival boxes, 2 1/2 archival boxes, 1 flat box)

Source: Transfer, 135th Street Branch, Countee Cullen Branch, 1979, 1984, 1992

Revision History: This finding aid was updated by Allison Hughes

Abstract: The 135th Street Branch Records document staff activities as they serviced the information needs of the Harlem community. There are eleven ledgers (1905-1935) containing lists of acquisitions, circulation statistics, library card registrations, and fines. There are also annual Children's Room reports from 1922 to 1950. The Correspondence, 1921-1951, includes a folder of correspondence between Ernestine Rose and Franklin F. Hopper, the Chief of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library, and a file for Dorothy R. Homer, who became the Branch Librarian following Ernestine Rose's retirement in 1942.

Preferred citation: [Item], 135th Street Branch records, Sc MG 219, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by N.R. Jeter and Diana Lachatanere in 2005 and 2014.

Sponsor note: Home to Harlem Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Separated Materials: Photographs transferred to Photographs and Prints Division. Printed material transferred to JBH Research and Reference Division.

Creator History

The 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library (NYPL) opened in 1905 to serve what was then a white, predominately Jewish neighborhood. By 1920, the demographics of Harlem had changed and the community was 50 percent black, requiring a refocusing of the scope of the collection. Ernestine Rose, a librarian who had successfully developed services in other ethnic neighborhoods, was assigned to adapt the 135th St. Branch's staff and resources to meet the needs of the burgeoning black community. In addition to integrating the collections and services, Rose hired Catherine A. Latimer, the first black librarian employed by the NYPL in 1920, and Regina Anderson Andrews, the second black librarian, in 1923. She also hired Nella Larsen Imes (1921) as a junior assistant in the Children's Room.

Under Rose's leadership the branch services flourished and by the late 1930s, the collections and services had outgrown the Branch building. In addition to the circulating functions for adults and children, the Branch housed the Negro Division of Literature, History and Prints, which was curated by Arthur Schomburg (1932-1938) and Lawrence D. Reddick (1939-1948), as well as the growing collection of paintings, sculptures, and African artifacts that decorated the walls and floor space. Rose campaigned for and obtained funds to construct a new facility on 136th Street, and in 1942 the Branch moved into its new building.

Keeping the designation of the "135th Street Branch," the circulating collections occupied the first and second floors, and the now-renamed Schomburg Collection (following Arthur Schomburg's death in 1938) occupied the third floor. In 1951 the circulating library was renamed in honor of the poet Countee Cullen, and in 1954 the Schomburg Collection moved back into its original location at 103 West 135th Street, officially separating the circulating collections from the Schomburg Collection, which was becoming known primarily as a scholarly research library.

Custodial History

Some of the records were interfiled with the Schomburg Center's administrative records and were transferred to the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division in the late 1970s. Other files were transferred from the Countee Cullen Branch during renovation in the 1980s.

Scope and Content Note

The 135th Street Branch Records document staff activities as they serviced the information needs of the Harlem community. There are eleven ledgers (1905-1935) containing lists of acquisitions, circulation statistics, library card registrations, and fines. There are also annual Children's Room reports from 1922 to 1950. The Correspondence, 1921-1951, includes a folder of correspondence between Ernestine Rose and Franklin F. Hopper, the Chief of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library, and a file for Dorothy R. Homer, who became the Branch Librarian following Ernestine Rose's retirement in 1942.

The Subject Files, 1919-1951, include two scrapbooks dated 1919 and 1942, files for the Harlem Adult Education Committee, 1932-1937 as well as files dealing with programs, statistics, and routine staff activities. The 1919 scrapbook contains photocopies of photographs of the people and buildings surrounding the 135th Street Branch with commentary by Franklin F. Hopper. (The original scrapbook has been transferred to the Center's Photographs and Prints Division.) The 1942 scrapbook commemorates the May opening of the new Branch building and contains copies of invitation letters from Ernestine Rose to Harlem luminaries, NYPL officials, board members, staff, and supporters of the 135th Street Branch. Also included is a draft of the program for the day, and the addresses given by Thomas B. Dyett, Vice-Chairman of the Citizen's Committee of the 135th Street Branch Library and the guest speaker, journalist Claude

Barnett, founder/director of the Associated Negro Press.
The Harlem Adult Education Committee (HAEC), which hosted adult education courses and other public programs at the Branch, is represented through meeting minutes, correspondence, and reports, 1921-1951. Two folders relate specifically to the Art Workshop, which was led initially by the African American artist/photographer James Lesesne Wells, and later by the artist Charles Alston. There are news clippings about exhibitions, budgets, and articles about its purpose and accomplishments. There is also general information about the HAE program at the Branch.

Key Terms

Subjects
Acquisitions (Libraries) -- New York (State) -- New York
African Americans -- Library resources
African Americans and libraries -- New York (State) -- New York
Book selection -- New York (State) -- New York
Libraries -- Special collections -- African Americans

Geographic Names
Harlem (New York, N.Y.) -- Intellectual life

Names
Alston, Charles, 1907-1977
Barnett, Claude, 1889-1967
Bearden, Romare, 1911-1988
Blackburn, Robert Hamilton, 1920-
Dyett, Thomas Benjamin, 1886-1971
Homer, Dorothy R.
Hopper, F. F. (Franklin Ferguson), 1878-1950
Lawrence, Jacob, 1917-2000
Rose, Ernestine, 1880-1961
Seabrooke, Georgette, 1916-2011
Wells, James Lesesne, 1902-1993
Harlem Adult Education Committee
New York Public Library. 135th Street Branch

Container List

Acquisitions and Circulation 1905-1935

b. 1 f. 1 Accession Book 1905 May-September

b. 1 f. 2 Accession Book 1905 June-December

b. 1 f. 3 Juvenile Statistics 1905 July-1911 December

b. 9 f. 5 Accessions/Acquisitions Book 1906-1921

b. 2 f. 1 Registration Book 1907 January-1910 December

b. 2 f. 2 Statistics 1912 January-1916 December

b. 2 f. 3 Small Expenses 1915 January-1918 December

b. 2 f. 4 Children's Registration Book 1926 October-1933 July

b. 2 f. 5 Fines, Reserves, Etc 1931 September-1935 December

b. 3 f. 1 Adult Registration Book 1932-1933

b. 3 f. 2 Adult Registration Book 1933-1935

Correspondence 1921-1951

b. 4 f. 1 1921-1938

b. 4 f. 2 Ernestine Rose - Franklin Hopper 1935-1938

b. 4 f. 3 Dorothy R. Homer 1942-1951

b. 4 f. 4 1942-1949

b. 4 f. 5 Elaine Simpson, Youth Assistant 1948

b. 4 f. 6 Music Recitals 1948-1951

Memoranda 1948-1951

b. 4 f. 7 135th Branch Name Change to Countee Cullen Branch 1948-1951

b. 4 f. 8 Branch Librarians 1950-1951

Reports 1919-1951

b. 4 f. 9 Circulation - Monthly Reports 1919-1927

b. 4 f. 10 Meetings - Reports 1921-1951

b. 4 f. 11 Registration - Reports 1926-1933

b. 4 f. 12 School Reports 1922-1931

b. 4 f. 13 Annual Reports 1939-1950

Children's Room Reports

b. 5 f. 1 1922-1929

b. 5 f. 2 1930-1934

b. 5 f. 3 1935-1936

b. 5 f. 4 1937

b. 5 f. 5 1938

b. 5 f. 6 1939

b. 5 f. 7 1940-1943

b. 5 f. 8 1943

b. 6 f. 1 1944

b. 6 f. 2 1945

Reports (cont.)
Children's Room Reports (cont.)
b. 6 f. 3 1946
b. 6 f. 4 1947
b. 6 f. 5 1948
b. 6 f. 6 1949
b. 6 f. 7 1950-1951
Subject Files 1919-1951
b. 6 f. 8 Adult Education - Readers Advisory Service 1932-1950
b. 6 f. 9 Adult Course - Journalism 1936
b. 6 f. 10 Black Bibliographies
b. 6 f. 11 Circulation Department Statistics 1948-1950
b. 7 f. 1 Circulation Department Statistics - Reference and Reading 1948-1949
b. 7 f. 2 Concert - Schomburg Collection 1950-1951
b. 7 f. 3 Facilities - Maintenance 1940-1948
Harlem Adult Education Committee
b. 7 f. 4 Committee Files, Meeting Minutes, Correspondence 1932-1937
b. 7 f. 5 Art Workshop Benefit 1933-1935
b. 7 f. 6 Art Workshop Benefit 1933-1936
b. 7 f. 7 Reports 1932-1934
b. 7 f. 8 Human Relations Course File 1934
b. 7 f. 9 Juvenile Play, Student Lounge 1948
b. 7 f. 10 "The Negro: A Selected Bibliography" 1950
b. 7 f. 11 Meetings – Use of Library Rooms 1921-1935
Newspaper Clippings 1943-1968
b. 7 f. 12 1943-1948
b. 7 f. 13 1943-1968
b. 7 f. 14 Press Releases and Publicity 1942-1946
b. 8 f. 1 Procedures, Rules Regulations 1950-1951
b. 8 f. 2 Programs 1929-1950
b. 8 f. 3 Staff Appointments and Resignations 1937-1951
b. 8 f. 4 Staff Leaves 1950-1951
b. 8 f. 5 Staff News 1943
Scrapbooks 1919-1943
b. 9 f. 1 1919
Reopening 1942-1943
b. 9 f. 2 Letters, Telegrams, Newspaper Clippings 1942-1943
b. 9 f. 3 Speeches 1942
b. 9 f. 4 Program