



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

Guide to the

Regina Andrews papers

1901-1987 [bulk 1920-1987]

Sc MG 275

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

Processed by Mary Yearwood in 1988.

Summary

Creator: Andrews, Regina

Title: Regina Andrews papers

Date: 1901-1987 [bulk 1920-1987]

Size: 8.58 linear feet (21 boxes)

Source: Donation, Regina M. Andrews, February 26, 1988

Abstract: The papers document Andrews' personal life and professional career and activities. Correspondence, reports, printed material, and writings are included. The papers include manuscripts of Andrews' plays *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, *The Man Who Passed*, and *Matilda*; the posthumously published *The Black New Yorkers* and an unpublished manuscript "Women ...With Banners and Human Rights: Laws, Statutes and Amendments in the Constitution of the United States." Andrews' professional activities at the Washington Heights Branch of the New York Public Library are, in part, very well documented by a series of scrapbooks containing photographs, broadsides and other printed material of the "Family Night at the Library" programs. Also included among the papers are some family correspondence, clippings, and a scrapbook relating to Andrews' husband, attorney and assemblyman William T. Andrews.

Preferred citation: [Item], Regina Andrews papers, Sc MG 275, 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 Mary Yearwood in 1988.

Creator History

Librarian, author, civic leader, and community activist, Regina Andrews (née Anderson) was born in Chicago in 1901 to Margaret Simons, an artist, and William G. Anderson, a lawyer. After graduating from Hyde Park High School in 1919, she attended Wilberforce University for one year, where she had her first library job at the university's Carnegie library. After leaving school, she got a job as a library

assistant through the Chicago Public Library's apprenticeship training program, but left in 1922 for New York City.

After applying for a job with the New York Public Library (NYPL), she was assigned to work at the 135th Street Branch, at that time a hub for many writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Andrews' Harlem home, an apartment at 580 St. Nicholas Ave known as "Dream Haven" that she shared with Louella Tucker and Ethel Ray Nance, the executive secretary of *Opportunity* magazine, also functioned as a gathering place for many figures of the period, including Zora Neale Hurston, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen.

While at the 135th Street Branch, Andrews became involved in Du Bois's CRIGWA (later KRIGWA) Players, which initially performed in basement of the library. After this group disbanded, Andrews cofounded the Harlem Experimental Theatre with Dorothy Peterson and Harold Jackman. Andrews performed in many of the group's productions and wrote plays under the pseudonym Ursula Trelling, two of which were produced by the group: *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* (1931) and *Underground* (1932). Andrews continued to support theater when she moved on to the 115th Street branch, allowing playwright Loften Mitchell's Pioneer Drama Group, later known as the 115th Street People's Theatre, to perform in the library.

In 1926, Regina married William (Bill) T. Andrews, a lawyer who went on to work as special counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), then became a state assemblyman representing Harlem. In 1948, the couple adopted a three-year-old daughter, Regina Ann.

Andrews' library career continued to grow, though she at times faced discrimination from NYPL administrators, who were slow to promote her. She worked at branch libraries throughout the city, including Woodstock in the Bronx, Rivington on the Lower East Side, and 115th Street, where in 1938 she became the first African American to head a library. In 1948, Andrews was appointed supervising librarian of the Washington Heights Branch, a post she held until her retirement in 1966. While there, she inaugurated a special library community outreach program which ran for thirteen years. Billed as "Family Night at the Library," this series concentrated on the social, political, and cultural life of Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia as well as on African-American history and culture. Distinguished scholars, artists, writers, statesmen, and representatives of various governments participated, and the programs were supplemented by exhibitions of art and artifacts and by annotated bibliographies.

Apart from her library career and creative interests, Andrews was involved in a variety of civic activities. In 1968, she served as a consultant for the controversial *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and subsequently used her research on the show to develop a manuscript that was posthumously published as *The Black New Yorkers*. She served on the boards of several organizations including the National Council of Women of the United States, of which she was a Vice President, and she represented the National Urban League as a member of the United States National Commission for UNESCO. Through the National Council of Women and other groups, Andrews made international trips to West Germany, West Africa, and Asia.

After retirement, Andrews and her husband moved from Harlem to their home in Mahopac, New York. Bill Andrews died in 1984 and Regina Andrews died in 1993.

See below for a timeline of Andrews' life. For more information, see Ethelene Whitmere, *Regina Anderson Andrews: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

1901 May 21 Regina Anderson is born in the Hyde Park section of Chicago.
1919 Graduates from Hyde Park High School.
1919-1920 Attends Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio.
1921-1922 Works at Chicago Public Library.
1922 Moves to New York City.
1923-1926 Works at 135th Street branch library.
1926 April 10 Marries William (Bill) T. Andrews.
1926-1927 Works at Hamilton Fish Park branch library.
1927-1930 Works at Woodstock branch library.
1929 Cofounds Harlem Experimental Theatre company.
1930-1936 Works at Rivington branch library.
1936-1948 Works at 115th Street branch library.
1948 Adopts three-year-old daughter, Regina Ann.
1948-1966 Works at Washington Heights branch library.
1958 Travels to West Germany on four-week study tour as a representative of the National Council of Women of the United States.
1964 Travels to several West African countries on a tour organized by the Musical Arts Group.
1965 Travels to several Asian countries through an award from the Asia Foundation.
1966 Retires from New York Public library.
1984 Bill Andrews dies.
1993 February 5 Regina Andrews dies in Ossining, New York.

Scope and Content Note

The papers document Andrews' personal life and professional career and activities. Correspondence, reports, printed material, and writings are included.

The papers include correspondence spanning Andrews' career with the New York Public Library, with the bulk of the NYPL files pertaining to her time at the Washington Heights Branch. The "Family Night at the Library" programs are very well documented by a series of scrapbooks containing photographs, broadsides, and other printed material. Andrews' involvement in other civic organizations, such as the National Urban League and National Council of Women in the United States, are also documented.

The writings include manuscripts of Andrews' plays *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, *The Man Who Passed*, and *Matilda*; unpublished children's stories; the posthumously published *The Black New Yorkers* and an unpublished manuscript titled "Women ...With Banners and Human Rights: Laws, Statutes and Amendments in the Constitution of the United States."

Also included among the papers are some family correspondence, clippings, and a scrapbook relating to Andrews' husband, attorney and assemblyman William T. Andrews.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American legislators -- New York (State)
African American librarians

African American women -- Biography
African Americans -- New York (State)
Librarians -- United States
Libraries -- Cultural programs
Libraries and community -- New York (State) -- New York
Women -- Biography
Women -- Legal status, laws, etc -- United States
Women social reformers -- United States
Women's rights -- United States

Names

Andrews, Regina
Andrews, William T., 1898-1984
Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963
National Council of Women of the United States
National Urban League
New York Public Library. Washington Heights Branch

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