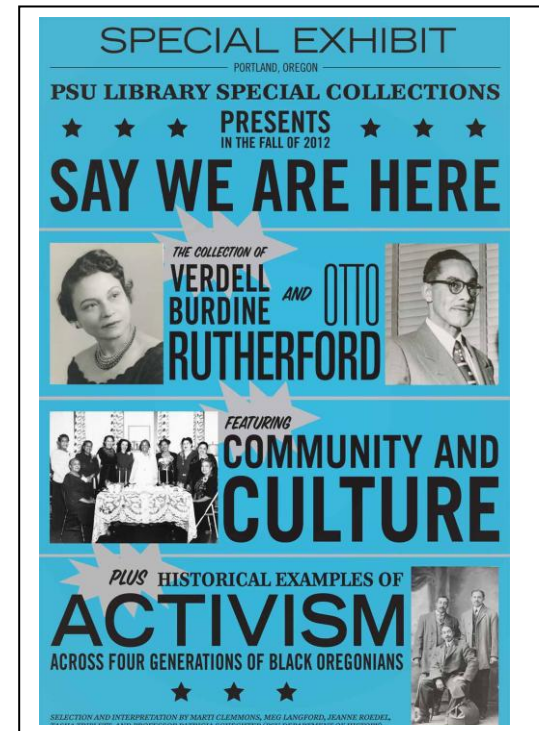


CATALOGUE

for the exhibit drawn from the
Verdell A. Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Family Collection

Portland State University Library
Fall 2012



forward by
Charlotte B. Rutherford

selection and interpretation by
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Tasha Triplett & Marc Carpenter

with a note on the collection by
Patricia A. Schechter
Professor of History

FORWARD

“Say We Are Here” – How the Verdell A. Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Collection Came to be

My mom Verdell A. Burdine Rutherford saved things. She had a relatively big house and was well organized, so she was able to save a lot of things and still not have just a path through her house. During the almost 65 years that she lived in the same house with my dad (which, by the way, was the house my dad had been raised in and where I was raised with my two brothers) she saved nearly every Black community newspaper that came and went during that time as well as clippings from the *Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal* about subjects, particularly those about African Americans, that she thought were important and that her children should know about.

She also saved those newspapers and things that belonged to my dad’s parents that pre-dated her move into the house in 1936. My dad’s family is a pioneering Oregon Black family. My grandfather came to Oregon in 1895. My dad was born in 1911 and they moved into the house in 1922. There were newspapers dating back to 1919 and photographs that were taken even earlier among my grandparents’ things that my mom also saved.

Over the years, mom allowed some of her and my dad’s photographs and newspapers to be used in various displays. In addition to loaning her articles to others, she made her own displays. She organized a panorama of photographs and articles about the history of Bethel A.M.E. Church for its new location after the church was displaced by the Memorial Coliseum around 1960. Also, she displayed photographs and articles about the local NAACP Branch when its national convention was held in Portland in 1978. Using mom’s newspapers and dad’s memory, they also assisted researchers and writers of publications and documentaries about Portland’s old Black community.

I knew the newspapers were historically important and told mom I wanted them as a very young woman. More than thirty years later, Portland Community College (PCC) contacted mom about using some articles for a display about Oregon’s Public Accommodations Law and segregationist practices of earlier years. She told PCC that the newspapers were mine and they had to talk to me about them. I told PCC that mom still had possession of the newspapers and that I was just her agent. I then negotiated payment for the use of her materials for the first time. She was quite pleased and proud to know someone would pay her to use what so many people had referred to as her “junk.” Most people knew about her newspaper collection, but they didn’t know she saved a lot more than newspapers.

When I cleaned out my parents’ house in 1999, I brought home over 100 boxes with the intent of going through them when I retired. I knew that whatever was in them, my mom had saved and I knew that I couldn’t throw anything away without looking at it first.

I now know that those boxes contained all kinds of things – every card and letter my mom had received from anyone; documents related to the organizations she belonged to and used her secretarial skills for; daily journals; receipts and records of personal income and expenditures; wedding invitations; funeral and event programs; copies of programs and fliers for political causes, church and social events that she made with her light table, typewriter and mimeograph machine; even her grade school penmanship award, high school diploma and a poem she had published when she was 14. Some of these things I had seen before, but many were new to me. There were so many boxes that I had to make a path through my basement after I moved them to my house.

Mom and I talked about her newspaper collection several times over the years. I promised her that I would find a home for it. She had a NAACP colleague who had donated her papers to a university not located in Portland and then complained about how her donation was being warehoused and not catalogued or used. At the time, mom expressed an interest in having her collection located in Portland and being available to the public. I suggested the Oregon Historical Society, but mom did not believe OHS deserved her collection because OHS did not care enough about Black people to collect its own information about us back in the day. I have been trying to find a home for my mom’s collection since she died in 2001 at the age of 88.

I considered donating part of the collection to the newly forming Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. I joined a group who had ideas of creating a museum and I currently am on the board of the Oregon Black Pioneers/Oregon African American Museum, with plans of creating a museum to be located in Salem. I even convened meetings to discuss creating our own Schomburg West.

About a year ago, my dear childhood friend Avel Gordly invited me to dinner along with Patricia Schechter. As it frequently did, the subject of my mom’s collection and my crowded basement came up. Patricia volunteered to use the collection to teach a class in archival methods and then return the boxes to me, with a listing of the organized contents. That sounded like a good deal and I agreed. But I was still focused on the newspapers.

When it came time to pick up the collection, Patricia asked if she could bring Cris Paschild of PSU’s library along. I agreed. Their visit has evolved into something more fulfilling than I ever could have anticipated or imagined.

Cris wanted EVERYTHING that I was willing to give to the Library's Special Collection Division. They wanted the whole story that mom had saved to tell. At the time, I don't think any of us realized just how much stuff there was and how varied those items were. Thanks to two classes of Patricia's students cataloging and organizing those boxes, we now know and can see the collection's full scope and contents. Without the assistance of Patricia and those students, there just would be about 100 boxes of various sizes. My deepest gratitude goes to those students for their hard work and sincere interest.

My mom's collection shows a slice of Portland African American life over many decades. It is both the personal and the public life of Otto and Verdell Rutherford, and by extension, their close family, many friends and associates. The collection shows that Portland Black people struggled, worked, partied, and went to church whether it was when only one or two thousand Black people were scattered around Portland or after the Vanport flood when a fairly sizeable Black community was first steered into the area of I-5, the Coliseum and Emanuel Hospital and later, further northeast, into my neighborhood at 9th Avenue and Shaver Street.

Patricia and Cris have validated my mother's belief that documenting the life and conditions of Black people is important. They recognized the historical significance of a collection from a family that had been actively involved in Portland's civil rights struggles and its community. They have made access to the collection possible and I hope their careers will be enhanced through use of the collection. I am certain that the more use is made of mom's collection, the happier she will be.

My parents and I shared a lifelong love of learning, especially about our history and culture as African Americans in this country. I do not know whether I developed my interest through their genetic material or by example. But, like my mom, I have my own collection that also focuses on African American life. I also save written material, including nearly all of the letters that I have received during my lifetime. I saved letters that mom wrote to me during various times when I lived away from Portland. I have also donated those letters so that mom's voice could be present in her collection.

Mom rightfully considered herself a local historian. She was that and so very much more: A beautiful woman with kind heart and a wonderful sense of humor; a volunteer hard worker and community activist who did not seek the limelight; a very good cook, especially her yeast rolls; and most importantly to and for me, a loving, supportive and inspirational mother. I am fortunate to have had her.

Thanks to her foresight, she and my dad will be forever immortalized by having some of their personal effects available for others to study. I am so pleased and proud that they will be remembered while telling the story of Portland's early African American community for future generations.

I have donated the collection to Portland State University, Millar Library Special Collections Division and the Black Studies Department. It is my hope that PSU students of all disciplines, but especially those of Black Studies, will find use of the collection in telling the full story of Portland's diverse African American community.

In closing, I must again thank the women who have made it possible for me to find a home for Verdell Rutherford's collection: My thanks to Avel Gordly for being my sisterfriend for more than half a century and for hooking me up with Patricia; my thanks to Patricia Schechter for her interest in the collection and for inviting Cris to join the group; and finally, my thanks to Cris Paschild for welcoming this project to the library and for proving the space and resources to maintain the collection and make it available to others. These wonderful women will forever be a part of my family for making it possible for me to keep my promise to my mom.

I know my mom is pleased, as am I.

Charlotte Burnadine Rutherford
Otto and Verdell Rutherford's daughter and youngest child
Portland, Oregon
November 2012

THE EXHIBIT

Family, Migration, and Home

The Burdine and Rutherford families came to the Pacific Northwest between the major migrations of African Americans out of the South in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Around 1890, two Rutherford brothers, William and Edward, were recruited from their native South Carolina to work as barbers at the Portland Hotel, an elite downtown establishment. William Rutherford married Charlotte (“Lottie”) White, also of South Carolina and a graduate of Scotia Seminary. The couple raised four boys, all of whom graduated from high school and pursued post-secondary education. The family lived for decades in a house they bought on NE Shaver Street in 1922.

In 1913, Earle and Margaret (“Maggie”) Burdine left Oklahoma for a fresh start at farming in Oregon. The couple’s heritage reflects the diverse population of Oklahoma, which was once Indian Territory, and the family includes Black, white, and Native American ancestors. The Burdines intended to take advantage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which made available lands for dry farming in the far west. They stopped in Bend and then moved on to Marshfield (now Coos Bay), Oregon, but could not own land because African Americans were prohibited by law from owning free land in the state. The Burdines finally established themselves in Washington state. There they raised seven children, all of whom graduated from high school in Yakima.

Verdell Burdine and Otto Rutherford met in Portland in 1921 as children, through church connections. The Great Depression of the 1930s brought geographical movement and economic displacement for many people, especially African Americans. When the two married in Oakland, California, in 1936, Verdell was working as a domestic for a family in San Francisco and Otto was working for the Union Pacific Railroad. They settled back in Portland, moving into the Shaver Street house with Otto’s father William, two of Otto’s brothers, and the family dog. Verdell and Otto raised three children in this home: William, Earle, and Charlotte. The family belonged to Bethel A.M.E. church, where Verdell worked as church secretary for many years.

Verdell Rutherford was an active historian. She was a keeper of family records and information which she shared with kin near and far. She also documented the Portland African American community by collecting public materials, like newspapers, and more private ones, like photographs and letters. Verdell did this work personally, in her home, and she also fostered it publicly, through local exhibits and displays. That individual families and groups donated their materials for safekeeping to the Rutherfords is testament to the trust they placed in Verdell as community historian.

Case 1 contents

Photograph by B.L. Aldrich

Easter at Bethel AME Church, April 17, 1949, Portland, Oregon. The entire Rutherford family is included in this panorama, including Verdell and Otto, grandfather William, and children, Earle, William, and Charlotte.

Photograph by Churchley of Portland, Oregon

W. H. and Lottie Rutherford, 1898

Photograph by The Columbia Studio

Harry Rutherford (standing, left), William Rutherford (seated), and Harry Vincent, c. 1895

Eventually the Rutherford brothers established their own barbershop in Portland on NW Flanders. African American-run businesses – including groceries, undertaking, liveries, publishers, midwifery, and tavern- keeping – provided important services to the community during the era of segregation.

Formal portrait of William, Alan, Otto, and Thomas Rutherford, sons of William and Lottie, c. 1925



Photograph of the Burdine family, just arrived in Coos Bay (then Marshfield), Oregon, 1913

Left to right: Dolores, Verdell, Alfred, mother Maggie, father Earle with son Earle on his knee.

Wedding corsage, 1936, preserved by Verdell Rutherford

Personal photograph, Rutherford family home, c. 1922

Verdell annotated this picture for posterity. The house became an historic landmark in 1999, nominated by the Bosco-Milligan Foundation.

Yakima High School diploma, Verdell Anna F. Burdine, 1931

The typing and stenography skills that Verdell learned in high school made a crucial difference in her ability to earn wages and engage in activism throughout her life.

Bethel AME Church program, February 9, 1958

The Bethel AME congregation in Portland dates back to 1889. The structure pictured in this document was completed in the early 1920s and was located at N. Larrabee Avenue. This program acknowledges the congregation's decision, "as a Living and Progressive Church," to "accept the challenge of Progress" and relocate to NE 8th Street. The city of Portland purchased the N. Larrabee site in 1958 to complete an urban renewal project, now the site of the Memorial Coliseum.

Emanuel Hospital Wristband

This memento pays tribute to the role of Dr. DeNorval Unthank in the life of the Rutherford family and larger African American community. For about 30 years, Unthank was the only practicing Black physician in Portland. Among his many accomplishments was his admission to the City Club of Portland as its first African American member. Not only did Dr. Unthank care for Otto Rutherford during this particular hospitalization, he also delivered all three of the Rutherford children. Verdell also worked as Unthank's medical secretary for many years.

Photograph by Richard Brown

"Collectors of Portland Printed Memorabilia of the Black Community, Otto & Verdell, February 1982."

Richard E. Brown, a long-time resident of Portland, is an activist and photographer.

Personal photograph, "1975 Four Generations."

Left to right: Verdell, Maggie, Charlotte, and Yasha.

Building Community

Verdell and Otto Rutherford each made exceptional commitments to community organizations. The Culture Club, founded by African American women in Portland in 1924 and affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACW), was home to some of Verdell's most cherished friendships and projects.

Such organizations were rooted in nineteenth-century voluntary traditions that flourished after the Civil War. These groups linked local African American communities to national bodies which in turn exercised economic and political influence for their members. For example, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, founded in Washington, D.C. in 1896, was very active with the Republican Party, especially after women's suffrage in 1919.

In the years after World War I, the women's club movement converged in Portland. African American women active in the Young Women's Christian Association advocated for a branch for their community and raised funds for the construction of a building at the corner of NE Tillamook and Williams Avenue, completed in 1926. The Williams Avenue YWCA was tightly networked with the Culture Club and other local women's groups. Together they helped meet the social, spiritual, and employment needs of young people in the surrounding community.

The Culture Club supplemented and corrected deficits in African American history found in the public educational system as well as in the local media and culture venues in Oregon. By fostering study clubs, "Negro History Teas," exhibits, displays and, crucially, college scholarships, the Culture Club made a decisive impact on many lives. These activities especially helped young people, since African American youth in public schools were steered away from college preparatory classes and toward vocational training. The Culture Club was especially successful at raising money for scholarships for college-bound students and in educational activities for the broader community.

The Vanport Flood of 1948 produced hardship on Black families who had relocated to Portland to work in the war industries, like the Kaiser shipyards. After the flood, the city turned away from the housing and employment needs of African Americans, who found themselves displaced and increasingly segregated. In this stressful context, the Williams Avenue YWCA struggled to regain its footing. The women of the Williams Avenue YWCA however remained active and continued to meet but dynamism shifted to the Culture Club. Under Verdell's leadership, African American women in Portland became much more actively linked to other organized women in the state through the Oregon Association of Colored Women (OACW) as well as to the national body (NACW). The state and national conventions gave Oregon women visibility, solidarity, and ideas for activism.

Case 2 contents

Annotated photograph of charter members of the Culture Club, c. 1924

Letter from Letitia Brock to The Rosebud Study Club, January 15, 1938

This letter suggests how the Culture Club coordinated a number of women's groups in order to advance "Negro History Week" and underscores the importance of the Williams Avenue YWCA building in hosting such efforts. The letter also highlights collaboration through the Oregon Association of Colored Women (OACW).

Photograph of Parade Float, Rosebud Study, probably Portland Rose Parade, c. 1918

Invitation to Culture Club Mardi Gras Benefit Scholarship Fund, 1941

Photograph of the Culture Club's Mardi Gras

Benefit Scholarship Fund Dance Royalty,

Portland Women's Club, May 12, 1941

Left to Right: Joyce Hilliard, Rose Marie Brock, Phillis Reynolds, Gertrude Williams, Betty Ann Rutherford, and Ruby Minor.

Oregon Association of Colored Women artifacts

Newsletter from 1951 and delegate registration card, 1958

Floats, banners, songs, displays, newsletters, conventions, and pennants fostered visibility and pride. Both in public and in private, these materials and activities created cultural space and legitimacy for African Americans within a larger society that frequently ignored or downplayed their presence and accomplishments, especially those of women.

Letter from Odessa Freeman to Mrs. C. Berry on YWCA letterhead, May 10, 1940

This letter acknowledges the close collaboration between the Williams Avenue YWCA and the Culture Club. By pooling resources to stock the building's kitchen, women moved their domestic skills into the public sphere in the community's interest.

National Notes Magazine, Autumn 1959

Verdell was a long-time subscriber to the NACW's publication, *National Notes*, and took great pride in announcing and publishing Portland women's accomplishments in its pages, which she then carefully annotated for future readers. This issue pictured the NACW's headquarters building in Chicago, named for noted club woman, Irene McCoy Gaines (1892-1964).

Prize Cup, Culture Club "Best Artwork" Award

Thelma Flowers '53, Lenora Gaskin '54, and Jo Anne (Vernell) Watson '55

Program of the 8th Annual Negro History Tea and Exhibit of the Oregon

Association of Colored Women's Clubs, 16 February 1958

"Negro History, Art Shown at Tea," *Oregonian*, 18 February 1953

The second week in February contained the birthdates of both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln and from the 1860s, these dates were marked by African Americans to commemorate the end of slavery. In 1926, with support from historian Carter G. Woodson and the *Journal of Negro History* in Washington, D.C., community groups and schools began to advance the notion of "Negro History Week" in February.

Verdell Rutherford and the Culture Club continued this tradition in Portland for decades. Fundraisers for scholarships usually accompanied these educational and commemorative activities. By actively promoting African American history in the community, Verdell helped women redefine what it meant to be Black in a largely segregated and frequently hostile environment.

Receipt for purchase of "books on education of the handicapped," Lewis and Clark College to Culture Club, June 30, 1952

This receipt demonstrates the Culture Club's philanthropic Commitment to supporting education, as emphasized in their club motto, "Progress through education."

Letter, Edna Tidwell to The Culture Club, September 25, 1963

In this letter, University of Oregon student Edna Tidwell acknowledges the scholarship she received from the club and pledges herself to being "worthy of this honor."

Culture Club Year Books

"Magic Carpet," 1938-39; "Charter Members," 1945-46; 1955-56; 1956-57

Building Community

For Otto Rutherford, local chapters of national fraternal organizations such as the Grand Lodge of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons and the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks afforded him decades of solidarity, leadership, and service opportunities. These fraternal orders often grew out of workplace or skill-based groups and did double duty as informal labor organizations; some, like the railroad brotherhoods, fed the organized union

movement directly. In the early 1900s, local orders of the Masons encompassed a significant number of prominent community members. For example, J.C Logan, E.D. Cannady, Howard Sproules and Edward Rutherford, co-founders of the *Advocate*, an early local Black-owned newspaper, were all Masons.

Otto went on to become an active member of the local Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks. Their Billy Webb Lodge is located at 6 North Tillamook and is the longest standing Black-owned building of Portland's African American community. Originally home to the "Williams branch" of the YWCA, it was also a meeting place for NAACP, the Oregon Association of Colored Women, the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality. It served as a recreation center for African American soldiers during World War II and as a refuge for Vanport residents fleeing the flood of 1948. The Elks purchased the property from the YWCA in 1959.

Case 3 contents

Photograph, Meeting of the Golden State Grand Chapter of the Eastern Star, Portland, Oregon, 1937

Yearly Masonic conventions were held throughout the Pacific Northwest, and Masons travelled extensively, welcoming, meeting and celebrating other brethren and the opening of additional lodges. Conventions were also a time to combine resources and create connections and community networks for political purposes.

Photograph by Baltzeger's Photos, Portland, Oregon of Billy Webb #1050 lodge members, c. 1950

Otto Rutherford is seated front and center, holding gavel.

Letter from T.A. Harris, Grand Master, Most Worshipful Sovereign Grand Lodge, to George Kenny of Excelsior Lodge #23, January 24, 1917.

Portland's Excelsior Lodge #23 was chartered under what is now known as the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California. Harris is responding to Kenny's inquiries on the local lodge's procedures and plans by placing them in the context of national practice.

Elks Lecture Book I.B.P.O.E., 1949

To enter and move up the ranks (or "degrees") of the Elks required study. Members read various texts, listened to lectures, and mastered history lessons in order to gain the knowledge and competency to lead their fellows. Elks tested and examined each other and in this way, the order offered educational and self-improvement opportunities.

Member pin and ribbon for the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (IBPOE)

This pin was worn by Otto Rutherford. Notice image of clock set to 11:00. This hour was traditionally set during meetings as a commemorative moment to acknowledge anniversaries or other important dates during Elks' meetings and gatherings.

Fez for members of Billy Webb Lodge #1050

Rutherford served as President, Exalted Ruler, ("P.E.R.") of Portland's Billy Webb Lodge. Webb was a piano teacher and musician who played with a band on steam ships that plied the Willamette River in the 1920s. Webb had migrated to Portland around 1906 and he and his band members established an Elks organization, initially named the "Enterprise Lodge."

Otto Rutherford's Past Master Grand Lodge Mason apron



Culture and the Community

The Rutherford family's community engagement went beyond their work with civic and social organizations, extending to the arts and communication. Otto Rutherford joined the cast of the Portland Civic Theater in 1948 and remained active in the local theater scene as a member of the Portland Black Repertory Theater, whose mission, according to director and producer Rosemary Allen, was to provide "a performance outlet for artists of color." Otto's daughter Charlotte, with her then husband, opened Blackfashion, Portland's first African American-focused clothing store in 1968. After returning to Portland State in 1974, Charlotte served as a student editor and writer for the Black Studies Program's magazine, *Ujima*, a forum for articles "related to the Black experience in urban America—on and off campus, fiction, scholarly pieces, prose, profiles of interesting indigents, and news of interest . . ." She was also the television host for the series "Black on Black," a show featuring "Black people talking about Black people; their problems and solutions."

Case 4 contents

Photograph of Otto Rutherford in costume as the King of Persia for a “St. Philips Players” performance of “Queen Esther,” 1952

Otto Rutherford is on the right. Father Lee Owen Stone of St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Parish is on the left.

“Black Theater Hopes Success in Script,” *Oregonian*, February 15, 1979

Otto Rutherford was an actor in the Portland Black Repertory Theater, which began at Portland State University in 1975. The troupe included theater arts students and community members.

Members of the Portland Black Repertory Theater, pictured in 1979

L-R: Rosemary Allen, Otto Rutherford, Ann Hall, Vernon Ambus, Kolleh Dura Suma

Program, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, 1978

This play, directed by Rosemary Allen, was the third production of the PSU Black Cultural Affairs Board. The performance troupe became the Portland Black Repertory Theater in 1979.

Program, *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman, Portland Civic Theatre 1948-49 season

Otto Rutherford, whose role (as Cal) was his first for the Portland Civic Theatre, is introduced on page 5.

Article, *Portland Observer*, October 2, 1975

Charlotte Rutherford (then Charlotte Williams) was the television host of “Black on Black,” a show aired by local public broadcasting and focused on “Black people talking about Black people; their problems and solutions.”

Article, *The Oregonian*, August 22, 1968

In 1968, Charlotte Rutherford and her then husband, Kenneth Jones, opened their retail store Blackfashion on 3619 NE Union Ave. In the article Charlotte and Jones note their hope that the store can also become a “retail outlet for crafts (including sewing) by residents of the Albina area.”

***Ujima*, publication of the Black Studies Program, Portland State University. Vol. 1, nos. 1, 2 & 3, 1975**

In addition to being a student of the Black Studies Program and an active member of the Black Students Union, Charlotte was also a student editor of *Ujima*, a magazine published by Black Studies. These issues include

photographs and a description of Portland’s 1974 Kwanzaa celebration and information on a 1975 panel at Portland State featuring then Mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson, and author Toni Morrison.

Activism

The Rutherfords took a leading role in fostering NAACP activities in Oregon from the 1940s to the 1970s. The Portland branch was founded in 1914, making it one of the earliest in the nation (the founding chapter in New York City was established in 1909). As civil rights agitation picked up after World War II, the Rutherfords led the effort to pass a Public Accommodations Law to prohibit discrimination in Oregon. Otto was president and Verdell secretary of the Portland NAACP when this bill finally passed in 1953.

Verdell’s secretarial and bookkeeping skills gave her activism a boost as well. She owned her own typewriter and mimeograph machine and did publicity and organizing work from their house on Shaver Street, often enlisting her children’s help. The Rutherfords participated in national civil rights meetings throughout the period. A special highpoint was achieved when the annual NAACP conference was held in Portland in 1978.

Otto and Verdell also gave time and energy to allied civil rights organizations, like the Urban League. Otto supported the railroad brotherhoods in union organizing efforts and founded Local 901 of the Amalgamated Textile and Clothing Workers Union at Dehen Knitting, where he was hired as the company’s first African American employee in the 1950s. Daughter Charlotte Rutherford went on to help found the Black United Front and the Black Justice Committee.

Case 5 contents

Invitation, “Four Freedom’s Dance,” 1944

Enormous civil rights energy was unleashed during WWII. Here Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” becomes an emblem for the “Double V” strategy among African Americans—a victory against fascism abroad and against racism at home. The dance shows how the Portland NAACP raised money for its advocacy and legal work as well as built community.

Handbill, Albina Hall Mass Meeting, c. 1930s

The mass meeting is a long-standing tradition in African American communities that dates at least to the end of slavery. Though the franchise was limited to adult men before 1919, whole communities gathered to

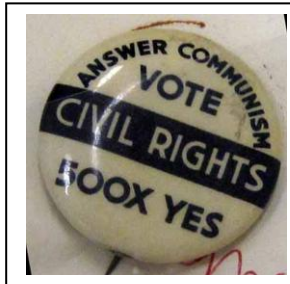
deliberate on positions and candidates. After women's suffrage, such deliberations received fresh urgency. Nonpartisan organizing served important educational purposes and during the civil rights movement, mass meetings were essential to fostering solidarity, hammering out agendas and strategies, and keeping spirits high.

Text of Oregon Senate Bill 169, Civil Rights Law, signed into law in April 1953

Photograph of NAACP Youth Group by Baltzegar's Photos, Portland, Oregon, undated.

Handbill and campaign button, c. 1950

Local initiative 500x was a Portland-based effort to outlaw racial discrimination in public accommodations. The measure failed. This handbill, designed and written by Verdell and printed at home, vividly represents the centrality of her labor and talents in political mobilization around civil rights in Portland.



Ninth Annual Meeting agenda program for the Portland NAACP Federal Credit Union, January 26, 1966

The NAACP credit union afforded community members local control of their finances and a path around racial discrimination in lending and financial services common in branch banking in the mid-twentieth century. In addition to roll calls, reports, elections, and refreshments, the program for this meeting included a musical selection by Velma Phillips and Carl Harris, presentations of the 1st and 1000th borrowers, awards, and a special tribute to NAACP Federal Credit Union founder Phil Reynolds.

Sheet music, "Support the NAACP" by Fred Norton and Walter Bishop

Group singing served a number of purposes in organizing. Learning and singing the words to songs built community and solidarity; the lyrics, handed down over the years, also bridged intergenerational links. Singing also drew on spiritual and religious traditions with familiar tunes put to new purposes.

Publicity photo, December 23, 1954

Godfrey Ibom, Nigerian exchange student from the University of Oregon, presents proceeds from the first settlement under the Oregon civil rights law to Miss Grace Choi, Korean exchange student for the University of Oregon Foreign Students' Service Fund and to Otto Rutherford, president of NAACP for its Legal Redress Fund.

Personal photograph of civil rights leaders, 1959

Left to right: Oliver Smith, U. K. Plummer, Thurgood Marshall, Otto Rutherford (standing) and Edgar Williams.

Program, 1978 NAACP national convention, Portland Oregon

Local school children participated in a contest to illustrate the cover of the program. The winner was Marcus Randy McKinley, a senior at Washington High School, then located in the southeast neighborhood.

Pamphlet protesting the shooting of Rickie Charles Johnson

In 1975, 17-year-old Rickie Charles Johnson was fatally shot in the back of the head by a Portland police officer during an alleged robbery attempt. He was the fourth Black male shot and killed by Portland police in a five month period. This pamphlet protests Johnson's shooting and the following inquest that found it "justifiable." The author's expression of appreciation for the support of the Black Justice Committee, the Portland Defense Committee, the Urban League, and the NAACP speaks to the breadth of the community's reaction to these incidents. Charlotte Rutherford was a founding member of the Black Justice Committee which led the call for a federal investigation into the shootings not only of Johnson but of Kenny Allen, Charles Menefee, and Joe Hopkins.

Press release on "Police Possum Posse," Black United Front, March 19, 1981

COLLECTION NOTE

This exhibit's title, "Say We Are Here," appears in the inscription found on the back of a photograph taken of Margaret and Earle Burdine and their children upon arrival in Marshfield, Oregon in 1913. Maggie Burdine's phrasing is an answer to an implied question; she presumes a dialogue with future keepers and viewers of the photograph. Maggie passed this historical consciousness on to her daughter, Verdell, who carried it forward with great intensity. A century after the photograph was taken, Verdell's daughter Charlotte today honors tradition with the gift of her family's papers to Portland State University in 2011. It is a privilege to introduce these materials to a wider audience.

The acquisition of the Verdell A. Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Family Collection by PSU library marks a high point for the study and transmission of African American history in Portland, the Pacific Northwest, and the nation. The collection is a unique, wide-ranging, and precious assemblage of primary source materials in three domains. The first involves the personal records of the Burdine and Rutherford families; these materials document migration, kinship ties, and place-making over the entire twentieth century. The second domain touches key community institutions in the African American community in Portland, Oregon in the middle decades of that century, especially clubs, voluntary associations, fraternal orders, and activist groups. The third area involves ideas, culture, and expressive activities undertaken by Verdell and Otto, especially the efforts of Verdell to preserve and promote African American history. Taken together, they present a remarkable portrait of a family and a community over four generations.

Those four generations include a strong line of women: Maggie Boles Burdine Cash, Verdell's mother; Verdell herself; her daughter, Charlotte (born 1947); and Charlotte's daughter, Al-Yasha (b. 1969). This multigenerational sweep is extremely rare in U.S. archival holdings. Unmistakably, the collection bears the special imprint of Verdell's vision, care, and meticulousness. A trained secretary and bookkeeper, Verdell was also an avid reader and collector of information, like newspapers. She was also a saver of everything from greeting cards, recipes, posters, and photographs to a variety of ephemera and memorabilia. She was a lively interpreter of the past for her intimate circle of

family, friends, and colleagues, as well as for a larger set of public audiences in Portland and beyond. Over the years, individuals, families, and organizations donated their own materials to the Rutherford family for safekeeping, further testament to their status as trusted guardians of community memory.

One of the most important contributions to knowledge made by this collection is its documentation of a specific historic phenomenon: the existence of a contiguous residential African American community in North and Northeast Portland, one with the highest percentage of home ownership of the major west coast cities at mid-century. Scholars have researched the making of this community, centered on the World War II era of migration and wartime employment. They have also documented the fragmentation and dispersal of this population via urban renewal and gentrification in the 1960s and 1970s. But this collection actually contains the records of the vibrant decades of the immediate post-war period at the height of the civil rights movement in the U.S. Of special interest are the school, church, club, fraternal, and activist activities that helped nourish those who stayed in Portland after the 1948 Vanport flood. These institutions provided key services and solidarity essential to survival in the often chilly social and political climate of Oregon.

Community institutions provided the base to launch activism which peaked in the 1950s and 60s. To date, Oregon does not figure in the usual tellings of the civil rights movement found in documentaries like *Eyes on the Prize*, the numerous King biographies, or the museums in iconic locations like Memphis and Atlanta. By providing details from Oregon's 1953 Public Accommodations Act to the 1978 hosting of the NAACP national convention in Portland, the Rutherford collection promises to recast the chronology and regional basis for the black freedom struggle in the U.S. The timing and dynamics of Portland's activism will greatly enrich what scholars and general audiences know about the causes, effects, pace, and direction of change in this understudied part of the country.

The Rutherford collection documents especially well the agency of women in family life, community building, and advocacy work. The collection contains backbone archival materials of key women's organizations, like the Culture Club (founded 1924) and the Williams Avenue YWCA (established in 1921). Relations among female kin, especially Maggie and Verdell and Verdell and Charlotte, are very richly detailed. In addition, Verdell's network of neighbors, friends, and family based in Portland and Yakima are astonishingly well preserved. Although they lived in the era of the telephone, this special group of women hand wrote letters and cards to one another with remarkable consistency. They faithfully marked the rhythms of the life cycle and shared

intimacy, humor, celebrations, frustrations, and grief over not just years but decades. The correspondence conveys an unusual immediacy and a kind of sacredness of words-in-relationship. The Rutherford collection easily trebles the historical record of what is available in the Pacific Northwest about African American women's history and it ranks among a very select number of collections nationally for its depth and scope.

The exhibit described in this catalogue highlights four themes: Family, Community, Culture, and Activism. Student researchers in PSU's public history program performed the lion's share of processing, selecting, and interpreting of the material. Three goals guided their work. First, we tried to make special use of the visual and three-dimensional items that the library was uniquely positioned to display in-house and that might be overlooked by traditional scholars who tend to stick to the printed record. Second, the curators wanted to highlight the intergenerational aspects of the collection, since that framing puts into relief the social rhythms and relationships among women that can be occluded by the more familiar frameworks of politics, elections, and legislative benchmarks (though these are, of course, included). Finally, the curators tried to keep in mind the reality of racial segregation for a group of historical actors who worked hard to oppose and subvert its effects. In other words, because the Rutherfords were such a high-achieving and engaged family, the curators had to read for the gaps and silences about discrimination when the documents tended to point to a successful outcome or solution.

The Rutherford collection contains traces of literally scores of lives in the Portland African American community during the twentieth century. Some of these lives are well known in local history, like those of Dr. DeNorval Unthank or attorney Thurgood Marshall. Some lives and faces flicker across the collection unnamed. This exhibit thus marks the first echoes of a response to Maggie Burdine's call that titles this exhibit: Say We Are Here. History is what we make it. It is up to us and future generations to listen to the stories and the silences in the collection in order to learn, be challenged, and be enriched by it.

Patricia A. Schechter

September, 2012

For more information about access to the Rutherford collection, please contact PSU Library Special Collections at paschild@pdx.edu or 503-725-9883

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