

A Guide to the Records of the Syphax Family, 1920-1993

Records of the Syphax Family, 1920-1993
1920-1993

A Collection in Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History RG 196
Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History
2020

Title Statement

A Guide to the Records of the Syphax Family, 1920-1993

Subtitle: Syphax Family, Records of the

Collection: RG 196

Author: Heather Crocetto

Publication Statement

Date: © 2020 Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Publisher: Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Gregory Pierce, 26 October 2020

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Collection number

RG 196

Language

English

Creator

The Syphax Family

Extent

4 boxes.

Repository

Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Margarite Reed Syphax (now Mrs. Margarite Syphax Vallery) in 2012.

Preferred Citation

Records of the Syphax Family, Collection # RG 196, Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Other collections documenting Arlington's Black community are [RG 11, Papers of Edmond C. Fleet](#), [RG 349, Dororthea Hamm Personal Papers](#), and [RG 328, Lomax AME Zion Church Papers](#).

Biographical/Historical Information

The name Syphax has been present in northern Virginia since the early 1800s. Some historians believe that Maria Carter Syphax might have been the daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of Martha Washington and adopted by George Washington. Maria grew up at Arlington House, the slave of Parke Custis, and married Charles Syphax, another slave owned by Parke Custis. After their marriage, they were granted 17 acres of land which was officially deeded to them by an act of Congress in 1866. William Syphax, one of Maria and Charles' ten children, became the first president of the trustee board of Colored schools in Washington, D.C. This William Syphax was the great-uncle of William Thomas Syphax.

William Thomas Syphax, who was born in Arlington, Virginia, became one of the leading black business entrepreneurs in the 1970s. His wife, Margarite Reed Syphax, was one of the first black businesswomen to be designated a Certified Property Manager. This prominent couple started a real estate and construction business that was recognized in *Black Enterprise's* first list of the 100 Top Black Businesses in 1973. While building his business, William also found the time to get a Masters' Degree in Engineering Administration from George Washington University, and a PhD in Behavioral Philosophy from Pacific Western University. He had earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the Virginia State College for Negroes in 1942 and became its Rector in 1974.

William and Margarite met when both were serving the United States during World War II. William was a Group Electronics Officer in the United States Army Air Corps and Margarite toured as an acrobatic dancer with the USO. When William and Margarite returned to Arlington County after World War II, housing was still heavily segregated. In the early 1950s they started selling real estate. They then expanded their business and filled a need by designing and building housing for other black residents who were then living in substandard housing in the area then known as "Johnson Hill" and now called Arlington View; William and Margarite lived at 1327 S Queen St. They also built an apartment complex that had an open rental policy - unlike other apartment buildings at the time that were race restrictive. Photographs of the first houses they built are found in the "The Syphax Story - Getting Started."

Scope and Content

The files of the Syphax Family consist of 1.67 linear feet and cover the time period 1920 to 1993. The collection is arranged into seven series. Series 1 comprises the papers of William T. Syphax, both personal and business. The papers of Margarite Reed Syphax make up *Series 2*. *Series 3* are photographs and *Series 4* are files on other Syphax family members. Some history of the Syphax family is found in *Series 5*. *Series 6* holds selected issues of *Black Enterprise* magazine from 1973 to 1983 and a copy of *Ebony* magazine from August 1977. All of these issues mention or feature Syphax businesses. *Series 7* holds miscellaneous personal items of both William and Margarite Syphax.

In the photograph collection there is one image of William Syphax with President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter and Margarite Syphax with Mrs. Richard Nixon. There are also letters in the file from Rachel Robinson (Mrs. Jackie Robinson), Julian Bond, Maynard Jackson, Walter Mondale, Charles Robb, and Herman Talmadge.

Index Terms

Subjects:

African Americans -- Virginia
African American families.
African American veterans
Arlington (Va.)
Arlington County (Va.)

Arrangement

The papers were donated in two boxes with many loose newspaper articles and magazines. One binder entitled "The Syphax Story" was kept intact and divided into four folders in *Series 1*, the sections titled by the Syphaxes. Other papers and photographs were organized by the processor into personal and business files of both William and Margarite Syphax, and then other Syphax family members, the magazines and miscellaneous personal items, such as diplomas and drivers' licenses. The newspaper articles were photocopied and some were reprinted from the *Washington Post* online database.

Contents List

Series 1: William Thomas Syphax, 1920-1989

Subseries 1: Personal Life

File 1: Birth and death certificates

Box 1

File 2: Education

Box 1

File 3: United States Army service

Box 1

File 4: Letters to Jessie Thomas Syphax (Mother of William), 1943

Box 1

File 5: Marriage, 1945

Box 1

File 6: Death - Funeral Program and obituaries

Box 1

File 7: Death - Condolence letters

Box 1

File 8: Death - Burial arrangements

Box 1

Subseries 2: Professional Life

File 1: The Syphax Story: Getting Started - Building of Homes, Apartments and Jobs

Box 1

File 2: The Syphax Story: Real Estate -- Black Business - Growing, Finances

Box 1

File 3: The Syphax Story: Black Enterprise

Box 1

File 4: The Syphax Story: Miscellaneous items found in front of binder

Box 1

File 5: Syphax Enterprises - "A Unique Investment Opportunity"

Box 1

File 6: Syphax Enterprises brochure

Box 1

File 7: Phoenix Food Systems, Inc., 1984 -- Phoenix Concept for Black Economic

Box 1

File 8: Phoenix Food Systems, Inc., 1984 -- A Unique Investment Opportunity

Box 1

File 9: Phoenix Food Systems, Inc., [n.d.] - Business Concept -- J.J.'s Urban Foodcenter System

Box 1

File 10: Blueprint for Economic Survival - Dissertation (draft) - 2 copies

Box 2

File 11: Copyright Registration for Blueprint for Black Economic Survival, 1983

Box 2

File 12: Vantage Press - Publishing Contract for Blueprint for Black Economic Survival, 1984

Box 2

File 13: Resumes

Box 2

File 14: Letters

Box 2

File 15: Newspaper articles

Box 2

Series 2: Margarite Reed Syphax, 1923-

Subseries 1: Education

Subseries 2: Professional Life

File 1: Certified Property Manger Certificate

Box 2

File 2: Resumes

Box 2

File 3: Honors

Box 2

File 4: Newspaper articles

Box 2

Series 3: Photographs

File 1: William Thomas Syphax

Box 2

File 2: Margarite Reed Syphax

Box 2

File 3: Group photographs

Box 2

Series 4: Other Syphax Family Members

File 1: Jessie Thomas Syphax (1895-1984)

Box 2

File 2: Archie Douglas Syphax (1921-1988)

Box 2

File 3: Evelyn Frances Reid Syphax (1926-2000)

Box 2

Series 5: History of Syphax Family

File 1: Maria Carter Syphax (1803?-1886)

Box 2

File 2: William Syphax (1825-1891)

Box 2

Series 6: Magazines

File 1: Black Enterprise, June 1973 (2 copies)

Box 3

File 2: Black Enterprise, June 1975 (2 copies)

Box 3

File 3: Black Enterprise, June 1976, and August 1976

Box 3

File 4: Black Enterprise, June 1977 (2 copies)

Box 3

File 5: Black Enterprise, November 1978, and January 1982

Box 3

File 6: Black Enterprise, June 1973

Box 3

File 7: Ebony, August 1977

Box 3

Series 7: Miscellaneous Personal Items

College diploma of WTS - Virginia State College for Negroes, Ettrick, Virginia, 1942

Box 4

Certificate of Merit to MRS - Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia, 1978

Box 4

Dog tag of WTS

Box 4

Drivers' licenses of WTS and MRS

Box 4

US Civil Service Commission Annuitant Identification Card of WTS

Box 4

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., life membership card of WTS

Box 4

Inter-Service Club Council, Past Recipient Man of the Year plaque, 2000

Box 4

Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History