

Robinson, Leonard H. memories photo album

Leonard H. Robinson memories photo album
1913-1919

Title Statement

Robinson, Leonard H. memories photo album Leonard H. Robinson memories photo album MSS 16772

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Publication Statement

Publisher: Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library
P.O. Box 400110
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4110
URL: <https://small.library.virginia.edu/>

2023-04-18

Notes

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MSS 16772

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/1502

Unit Date

1913-1919

Mixed Materials

BW 52 (box)

Container

1 (folder)

Language

English

Creator

Robinson, Leonard H., 1898-1990

Extent

.03 Cubic Feet 1 letter folder 1 photo album

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was purchased from Type Punch Matrix by the Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia Library on 11 January 2023.

Preferred Citation

MSS 16772, Leonard H. Robinson memories photo album, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library.

Biographical / Historical

Leonard H. Robinson was born to a Black mother (Maude, born 1879) and an unidentified father near Washington Court House, Ohio on June 7, 1898. Maude's 1900 census record lists her occupation as "Servant" and includes her two sons, Leo and Leonard. The brothers were raised in Marietta, Ohio by an aunt and Uncle: A. C. and Nettie Alford (both Black). Leo was clearly light skinned which allowed him to move more freely between the white and Black communities of the small city. He had friendships with adults and young people alike in both races. The two social lives rarely, if ever intersected- a fact Leonard understood.

Leonard attended Marietta High School and played on a segregated high school football team, where he was passing as white. He briefly moved to Akron and lived in a seemingly all-white boarding house.

Leonard's ability to pass as white is reflected in his gradually changing racial self-identification. His birth record, 1910 census entry, and his WWI draft card list his race as "Negro." On the 1920 census, he called himself, "Mulatto." In all documentation beginning with his 1921 marriage certificate in Coldwater, Michigan, he lists his race as "White." His wife, Ruth Irene Mushaw shows an almost identical racial background as Leonard. The couple identified themselves as "White" and eloped in 1921. She was also raised in a Black family and was identifying as white on her records. She was also a student at Ohio Northern University. Leonard's 1990 obituary names him as a graduate of Ohio Northern University's Pharmacy program in 1921, where he appears to have been the only Black student in his class. Robinson's interest in the field of pharmacy started in his youth.

Content Description

This collection contains one photo album documenting the late adolescence and early adult years of Leonard H. Robinson from 1913 to 1919. Robinson, a Black man, was born and raised in Ohio. Robinson was light-skinned, which allowed him to be a part of the black and white communities of Marietta, Ohio, where he was raised, and his life in Akron, Ohio, where he lived for a short time. The album documents himself and his life, including pictures of his family and friends of both races, him as a player on a segregated football team, and shows his interest in pharmacies. Through the album, it is clear that the two worlds were kept separate, and his ability to pass as white leads to his changing racial self-identification-- in census records and other documents would self-identify as Black, "Mulatto", and White. Robinson attended Ohio Northern's Pharmacy program in 1920 and graduated in 1921.

Keywords

African American families
African American students
Passing (Identity)

General

Comments made by Leonard Robinson in his photo album point to the discrimination that he experienced as a Black person. One caption reads (underlined) "Look us over carefully." The album is an important document and is worthy of further study.