

Record Series #: 1121-103**Name: W. W. Law Moving Image and Sound collection****Dates: 1955-2004, no date****Extent/Size: 27 boxes (18 cubic feet)****Language: English****Name of Creator(s):**

Westley Wallace Law (W. W. Law)

Biographical History:

W. W. Law (1923-2002) was a prominent Civil Rights leader, local historian, historic preservationist and community leader in Savannah, Georgia.

Westley Wallace Law was born on January 1, 1923 in Savannah, Georgia, the oldest of three children of Geneva Wallace and Westley Law. He was greatly influenced by his mother, Geneva W. Law, grandmother, Lillie Belle Wallace, mentor, Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert, and scoutmaster, John S. Delaware. Both Reverend Gilbert and John Delaware were officials in the Savannah chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Law joined the NAACP Youth Council in high school and later served as its president. He attended Georgia State Industrial College (now Savannah State University) before being drafted into the U. S. Army during World War II. After he completed his military service, he finished his bachelor's degree in biology. Law was a long-time boy scoutmaster for Troop 49 which was made up of boys from First Bryan Baptist Church, of which he was a member and Sunday school teacher. He was a mail carrier for the United States Postal Service for over forty years.

From 1950-1976 Law served as President of the Savannah chapter of the NAACP. During the 1960s, he led weekly mass meetings at Bolton Street Baptist Church and St. Philip A.M.E. Church during which he urged "passive resistance to segregation" and nonviolent protests. He was involved in efforts to desegregate Grayson Municipal Stadium, department store lunch counters on Broughton Street, and the beaches at Tybee Island. He led an eighteen-month boycott of Broughton Street merchants. Law is largely credited for helping to keep Savannah's Civil Rights movement more peaceful than those in other southern cities. In 1961, he was fired from his postal job because of his Civil Rights activities, but reinstated after national NAACP leaders and President John F. Kennedy came to his defense.

After finishing his run as NAACP president, he focused his efforts on preserving Savannah African American History. He established the Savannah-Yamacraw Branch of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), the King-Tisdell Cottage Museum, Beach Institute African American Cultural Center, the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, and the Negro Heritage Trail Tour. He also helped bring attention to and preserve Laurel Grove South Cemetery, the City's historically African American municipal cemetery.

Law received honorary doctorates from the Savannah College of Art & Design and Savannah State University. He was honored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation for his preservation efforts in the community. W. W. Law died on July 28, 2002 at his home in Savannah. He willed his home and belongings to

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Remer K. Pendergraph who formed the W. W. Law Foundation to celebrate and continue the work of W. W. Law. The Foundation in turn donated his collections, documenting Savannah's civil rights movement, historic preservation, and African American history, to the City of Savannah for preservation and access to the public.

For more information on W. W. Law see:

Elmore, Charles J. "W. W. Law (1923-2002)." New Georgia Encyclopedia, last updated 10 January 2014 (available on the web at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/w-w-law-1923-2002>).

Scope and Content:

The W. W. Law Moving Image and Sound collection includes various media formats recording a variety of content collected by W. W. Law. Media formats include: audiocassette tape, motion picture film, reel to reel, VHS tape, ½ inch open-reel video tape, Hi8 video tape, and U-Matic tape. All formats have various sizes and duration of recordings. The content of the recordings varies, including: recordings of NAACP Savannah Branch events, motion picture films, local news television and radio programs, concerts of local artists, interviews, oral histories, local museum events, Savannah's Mutuals Benevolent Society events, church events, and more. The recordings feature prominent Savannahians, such as W. W. Law, Dr. John Jamerson, Jr., and R. W. Gadsden; Savannah institutions, such as First African Baptist Church, and the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum; national leaders, such as Clarence Mitchell, and Langston Hughes; well-known artists, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers; other organizations, such as the Savannah-Yamacraw Branch of the Association for Afro-American Life and History (ASALH); and others. The recordings give glimpses into historic movements of Savannah, offering insights on the Civil Rights Movement, the push for historic preservation, and the development of Savannah's tourism industry.

System of Arrangement & Ordering:

The physical arrangement of this collection is by format and size to facilitate storage and preservation. The intellectual arrangement of subjects can be discovered in various inventories attached to this document.

Conditions Governing Access:

Physical access to the collection is available with a scheduled research appointment. Researchers should contact the Municipal Archives a minimum of 24 to 48 hours before their anticipated visit date. Researchers must bring their own headphones to listen to playback. Playback is not available for the U-Matic tapes, motion picture film, ½ inch open-reel video tapes, VHS tapes, Hi8 video tapes, and a selection of reel to reels at this time. Several recordings were found with significant damage due to the manner in which the collection was housed prior to donation to the City of Savannah. Access to recordings exhibiting severe preservation issues will be at the discretion of Municipal Archives staff.

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Digital Access:

Digital access to select items is available online at: www.savannahga.gov/DigitalCollections. Items that have been digitized are noted in attached inventories.

Related Collections:

Record Series 1121-105, W. W. Law Music Collection, City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.*

Georgia State University, Georgia Government Documentation Project: P-Oral Histories (<http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/search/collection/ggdp>)

*Duplicates of the audiocassette tapes exist in the W. W. Law Music Collection and the W. W. Law Moving Image and Sound collection. Pertinent information regarding the audiocassettes was added to this collection's inventories to foster discovery of these items.

Access Points:

African Americans--Civil rights

African Americans--History

African Americans--Georgia--Savannah.

African American churches--Georgia--Savannah.

African American schools--Georgia--Savannah.

Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. Savannah-Yamacraw Branch (Ga.)

Beach Institute

Cemeteries--Georgia--Savannah.

Civil rights leaders (Savannah, Ga.)

Clergy--Chatham County (Ga.).

Cobb, W. Montague (William Montague), 1904-1990

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Fisk Jubilee Singers
Georgia Historical Society
Gilbert, Ralph Mark, 1899-1956
Historic sites--Georgia--Savannah.
Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967
Jackson, Mahalia, 1911-1972
King-Tisdell Museum
Law, W. W. (Westley Wallace), 1923-2002
Mitchell, Clarence M. (Clarence Maurice), 1911-1984
Mutual Benevolent Society. Savannah (Ga.)
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Meetings.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Savannah Branch (Ga.)
Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum
Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976
Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education
Savannah (Ga.).
Savannah (Ga.)--History.
Savannah (Ga.)--Race relations.
Savannah College of Art and Design
Savannah State University (Ga.)
Savannah. First African Baptist Church.
Savannah. First Bryan Baptist Church.
Sea Islands Creole dialect
Segregation--Georgia--Savannah.
Spirituals (Songs)
Spottswood, Stephen G. (Stephen Gill), 1897-1974
Voter registration--Georgia--Savannah.

Sponsors/Funding:

Chatham County, Georgia, Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funding.

Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Recordings at Risk program.

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City of Savannah, Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia [GSG (OCLC/LYRISIS)]

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