

Record Series #: 1121-117**Name: Ralph Mark Gilbert papers****Dates: 1926, 1933-1948, 1952, no date****Extent/Size: 0.25 records carton, 1.0 oversized box (0.5 cubic feet)****Language: English****Name of Creator(s):**

Ralph Mark Gilbert

Biographical History:

Ralph Mark Gilbert (1899-1956) was a prominent African American religious and civil rights leader in Savannah, Georgia.

Ralph Mark Gilbert was born to Reverend Matthew Gilbert (1862-1917) and Agnes Boozer Gilbert (1862-unknown) in Jacksonville, Florida on March 17, 1899. Gilbert was the youngest of five children, and the family moved across the country, following Reverend Matthew Gilbert's various ministries and professor positions. Reverend Matthew Gilbert was a well-known and famous religious orator and teacher who passed away in Nashville, Tennessee on March 8, 1917. Ralph Mark Gilbert would earn several degrees, attending Roger Williams College, Morehouse College where he received a Bachelor of Arts, and Howard University where he received a Bachelor of Divinity. Gilbert started his clergy work with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1917. He then attended the University of Michigan where he received a Master of Arts in Drama by 1921.

Gilbert married Juanita Jennette Heady (1901-1943) around 1924, and the couple moved to Texas where they had three children. Ralph Mark Gilbert, Jr. (1925-2008) was born first, followed by William Henry Gilbert, Jr. (1927-2000), and then Genevieve E. Reynolds (1929-1980). The family moved to South Bend, Indiana where the couple had two more children, Ruth Agnes Lino (1933-unknown) and Juanita Jennette Robinson (1936-1991). Throughout the 1930s Gilbert toured his passion plays, in which he wrote the dramas and directed the performances. The performances were held at churches and sponsored by organizations across the Midwest and Northern United States. He was the presiding pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church in South Bend, Indiana at the time of these performances.

Gilbert was hired as the Reverend for Savannah, Georgia's First African Baptist Church in 1938. Unfortunately, his wife, Juanita, passed away in 1943 and his five young children were left without a mother. On a visit to New York City as a guest speaker, Gilbert met Eloria Sherman (1921-). Eloria Sherman was raised in New York City by her parents, Deacon James Sherman and Rose Sherman, along with five siblings. She attended New York City College Biblical Theological Seminary and the couple married at First African Baptist Church on October 22, 1945.

Gilbert was heavily involved in Savannah's African American community. He was the principle leader in reestablishing the Savannah branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He helped establish the Georgia State Conference of NAACP branches and served as president from 1942-1948. He served as president of the NAACP Savannah branch from 1942-1950, within this time he was instrumental in the integration of the City of Savannah police force and establishing NAACP branches and youth councils throughout the state. Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert and Eloria Gilbert would travel across the state speaking

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to rural and college towns urging the establishment of NAACP branches and equal rights for African Americans. Gilbert also helped establish the Citizens Democratic Club, the West Broad Street YMCA, and the Greenbriar's Children Center in Savannah. He was a strong advocate for the equal treatment of African Americans and was integral in the Savannah Civil Rights Movement.

Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert passed away while on vacation in New York City on August 23, 1956. The Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum located at 460 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in Savannah, Georgia, was established by his mentee Westley Wallace "W. W." Law (1923-2002) and the Savannah Yamacraw branch of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), was named in his honor.

Scope & Content:

The Ralph Mark Gilbert papers contain personal papers created and collected by Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert, including a scrapbook that details the numerous performances of dramatic and passion plays written and directed by Gilbert and hosted by churches and organizations all over the United States. Types of records included in the scrapbook are news articles, event programs, photographs, ticket stubs, telegrams, correspondence and promotional letters. The scrapbook spans the years 1933-1952 and includes material from states in the North, South, and Midwest. There are also folders of loose material on Gilbert's passion plays, music, First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Georgia) events, and other writings. The additional material in this collection are documents compiled by Gilbert on Reverend Matthew Gilbert's (his father) life, including a biography, excerpts from Reverend Matthew Gilbert's speeches and sermons, and photographs. An item of note from the scrapbook is a program that details the event sponsored by the Chatham County Council of Colored Parent-Teachers Association on November 13, 1939 held at the Municipal Auditorium where Gilbert's most famous sacred play, "Passion and Triumph," was performed locally.

System of Arrangement & Ordering:

The Ralph Mark Gilbert papers are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Conditions Governing Access:

Collection is stored offsite and researchers must request desired records at least one (1) full business day before scheduled research appointment for access.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Digital Access:

The scrapbook and a selection of documents from the collection can be found online [here](#).

Related Collections:

Record Series 1121-100, W. W. Law Photograph Collection. City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.

Record Series 1121-102, NAACP Savannah branch records. City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.

Record Series 1121-109, ASALH and related cultural organizations records. City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.

Record Series 1121-112, W. W. Law Personal papers. City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.

Access Points:

African American religious leaders

Chatham County Council of Colored Parent-Teacher Association (Savannah, Ga.)

Civil rights--Georgia--Savannah.

Clergy--Chatham County (Ga.).

First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.)

Gilbert, Matthew William, 1862-1917

Gilbert, Ralph Mark, 1899-1956

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Savannah Chapter (Ga.)

Performance-Religious aspects

Sacred dramatic music

Young Men's Christian Association (Savannah, Ga.)

Sponsors/Funding:

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

Preferred Citation:

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

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Processed by:

M. Kerkhoff, February 2021.

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Inventory

Box

Folder

Folder title, date(s) [Archivist's notes]

Box 1121-000-0003

Folder 1121-117-0001	Congressional Record of the Senate excerpt, pages 8129-8134, July 1945 [includes photocopy of letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, July 13, 1945 with reply, content is focused on repatriation of African Americans to West Africa]
Folder 1121-117-0002	First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Georgia) event programs, 1946, no date
Folder 1121-117-0003	Flyers advertising Ralph Mark Gilbert's oratory services, no date
Folder 1121-117-0004	"The Guiding Star," by Ralph Mark Gilbert song sheets, no date
Folder 1121-117-0005	"The Living Saviour," by Ralph Mark Gilbert sheet music, 1952
Folder 1121-117-0006	"The Relation of the Minister to the Physician," by C. V. Roman, 1926
Folder 1121-117-0007	"The Story of My Present Tribulation," by Ralph Mark Gilbert, June 29, 1948
Folder 1121-117-0008	"The Way of the Messiah," biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Introduction, Index, and Part One, biography, no date
Folder 1121-117-0009	"The Way of the Messiah," biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Part Two, telegrams and letters of condolences, no date
Folder 1121-117-0010	"The Way of the Messiah," biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Part Three, resolutions, no date
Folder 1121-117-0011	"The Way of the Messiah," biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Part Four, eulogies, no date

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- Folder 1121-117-0012 “The Way of the Messiah,” biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Part Five, sermons and addresses from Reverend Matthew Gilbert, no date
- Folder 1121-117-0013 “The Way of the Messiah,” biography of Reverend Matthew Gilbert, rough sketch, compiled and edited by Ralph Mark Gilbert-Image placements, photographs and original folder in which material was found, no date [photograph portraits of Powell Lindsay and Victor Hugo Greene]

Oversized Box 1121-117-0014

Ralph Mark Gilbert’s Performances Scrapbook, 1933-1947, 1952, no date [the scrapbook was found deconstructed, pages are fragile, and the entire scrapbook has been digitized, view the scrapbook online]

- Envelope 01 Broken and loose pieces of scrapbook pages, no date
- Folder 01 Scrapbook covers, no date [2 items]
- Folder 02 Scrapbook pages, documents and clippings from Georgia, Texas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Maryland, 1933, 1936-1939 [8 pages]
- Folder 03 Scrapbook pages, documents and clippings from Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Maryland, 1936-1938, no date [6 pages]
- Folder 04 Scrapbook pages, documents, clippings, sheet music from Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, 1934-1935, 1938, 1952 [9 pages]
- Folder 05 Scrapbook pages, documents and clippings from Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, 1934, 1940, no date [10 pages]
- Folder 06 Scrapbook pages, documents, clippings and memorandum, from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Indiana, Tennessee, 1934, 1938-1939 [5 pages]
- Folder 07 Scrapbook pages, documents, clippings, and playlet script, New York, Maryland, Washington, D. C., 1934, 1937, 1947 [5 pages]
- Folder 08 Scrapbook pages, documents and clippings, Washington, D. C., Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, 1934-1935 [12 pages]

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- Folder 09 Scrapbook pages, documents, clippings, and photograph, Texas, New York, Washington, D. C., 1936-1937 [9 pages]
- Folder 10 Scrapbook pages, documents, clippings, and photographs, Texas, New York, Arkansas, Missouri, 1936-1937 [7 pages]
- Folder 11 Scrapbook pages, documents and clippings, New York, Tennessee, Missouri, 1937 [10 pages]
- Folder 12 Scrapbook loose documents from Georgia, Texas, 1936-1937, 1943 [4 items]