

The Simons Family

A Register of Its Papers in the Library of Congress

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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

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Collection Summary

Title: Simons Family Papers

Span Dates: 1887-1982

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1918-1945)

ID No.: MSS58628

Creator: Simons family

Extent: 3,850 items; 16 containers; 6.4 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Members of the Simons (Simmons) family, an African-American family centered in South Carolina and Washington, D.C., especially William H. Simons (1881-1938), Baptist missionary and Young Men's Christian Association official, and members of the allied Garrett and Nicholson families. Correspondence, diaries and diary notes, and miscellaneous material relating chiefly to William H. Simons and his career with the YMCA in Burma, East Africa, and India and as a Baptist missionary in Nigeria.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Personal Names

Garrett family.

Nicholson family.

Simmons family.

Organizations

Benedict College.

Gordon College (Wenham, Mass.)

United States. Army. Corps of Engineers. Regiment, 357th.

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.)

West Virginia State College (Institute, W. Va.)

Subjects

African American families--South Carolina.

African American families--Washington (D.C.)

African American universities and colleges.

Bands (Music)

Baptists--Missions--Nigeria.

Buddhism.

Hinduism.

Jazz.

Quartermasters.

Railroads--Employees--Training of--Africa, East.

Romance languages--Study and teaching--West Virginia.

Rural schools--South Carolina.

Schools, British--Africa, East.

Swing (Music)

Teachers--South Carolina.

Telegraph--Africa, East.

World War, 1939-1945--Europe.

World War, 1939-1945--Haiti.

World War, 1939-1945--Music and the war.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Young Men's Christian associations--Africa, East.

Young Men's Christian associations--Burma.
Young Men's Christian associations--India.

Locations

Durban (South Africa)--Race relations.
Durban (South Africa)--Social life and conditions.
German East Africa.

Related Names

Curtis, Joseph O. Papers of Joseph O. Curtis.
Garrett, Naomi Mills. Papers of Naomi Mills Garrett.
Simons, Alfred E. Papers of Alfred E. Simons.
Simons, William H., 1881-1938. Papers of William H. Simons.
Simons, William H., 1924- Papers of William H. Simons.

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of the Simons family, including those of William H. Simons (1881-1938), Baptist missionary and Young Men's Christian Association official, and other members of the Simons, Garrett, and Nicholson families, were given to the Library of Congress by Ruth Simons Nicholson in 1978-1979 and 1983.

Processing History:

The papers of the Simons family were arranged and described in 1997. The finding aid was revised in 2007.

Transfers:

Some photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the these papers.

Copyright Status:

Copyright in the unpublished writings of the Simons family in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Simons Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

William H. Simons

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1881, Oct. 2	Born, Columbia, S.C.
ca. 1900-1917	Attended intermittently Benedict College, Columbia, S.C. and Virginia Union College, Richmond, Va.
1918	International secretary, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), East African Expeditionary Force, British Army, Dar-es-Salaam, East Africa
1919-1922	International YMCA secretary, Delhi, India, and Rangoon, Burma

1922-1924	Headmaster, American Baptist Foreign Mission School, Myingyan, Burma
1925-1926	Lecturer, Washington, D.C., and Virginia Instructor, Virginia Union College, Richmond, Va.
1927-1930	Attended Gordon College, Wenham, Mass.
1930	Bachelor of divinity, Gordon College, Wenham, Mass. Ordained, Boston, Mass.
1930-1938	Baptist missionary and teacher, Ogbomosho, Nigeria
1938, Mar. 31	Died, Ogbomosho, Nigeria

Scope and Content Note

The papers of the Simons family, an African-American family centered in South Carolina and Washington, D.C., span the years 1887-1982, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1918-1945. Roughly half the collection consists of the papers of [William H. Simons](#). His career included service as international secretary with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) International Committee in East Africa, India, and Burma and as a Baptist missionary teacher serving in Nigeria. The rest of the papers constitute a series titled [Other Family Members](#) and consist mainly of correspondence by members of the related Simons, Garrett, and Nicholson families.

William H. Simons's service with the Young Men's Christian Association in German East Africa (Tanganyika) and British East Africa (Kenya) during World War I and his continued service with the YMCA after the war in India and Burma are documented in diaries, notes, and correspondence. In a 1918 diary, Simons describes his wartime voyage to East Africa with fellow YMCA officials, a Red Cross unit, missionaries, soldiers, refugees, and miners. He had the opportunity to experience and observe racial and social conditions in South Africa when the ship docked for a month at Durban. Friendships and correspondence with A. Neely, director of the Seaman's Institute and Rest (Durban), and Benjamin Skeets, American merchant seaman, radio operator, and passionate atheist, resulted from this South African sojourn.

According to the 1918 diary, when Simons reached Dar es Salaam, German East Africa, he was assigned to Railroad Institute schools near Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, British East Africa (Kenya). The Railroad Institute, a wartime training organization financed by the African Railroad and administered by the YMCA, trained Africans in railroading skills, such as telegraphy, to further the British campaign against the Germans in East Africa. One of the students with whom Simons carried on a correspondence over many years was Seth Nakiafu, who became a prominent educator in his native Uganda.

Simons's papers include a photocopy of a 1919 diary, loose diary pages covering January 1920, and a bound journal for 1922, periods when he was working as a YMCA international secretary at British and Indian army facilities in India and Burma. These diaries emphasize his travels and his impressions of Hindu and Buddhist religious practices, and they document his YMCA work. Correspondents from this period and from his stint as headmaster of the American Baptist Mission School in Myingyan, Burma, 1922-1924, include Mary Hall Cowdrey, Ruth Cowdrey, W. B. Hilton, H. E. Hinton, George R. Hovey, B. S. Mani, and Julia Rattanchand.

The bulk of the [William H. Simons](#) series consists of correspondence with colleagues, family members, and friends from his travels and his student days at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, Virginia Union College in Richmond, Virginia, and Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. Simons and the Nigerian Baptist clergyman Nathaniel D. Oyerinde were students together at Virginia Union College before World War I and colleagues during the 1930s at the Baptist College and Seminary, Ogbomosho, Nigeria, where Simons was a teacher and librarian and Oyerinde served as principal. Simons also conducted a lengthy correspondence with Kate E. Gale, a member of the Virginia Union faculty.

Gordon College classmates with whom Simons corresponded include Simeon Bankole-Wright and Esther R. Beer. Correspondence generated during his years at the Baptist College and Seminary at Ogbomosho, Nigeria, include letters from student A. B. Batubo and from Elizabeth R. Frost, a Baptist missionary in the Belgian Congo.

Most of Simon's letters in these papers were written to family members, including his parents, Isom W. and Minnie Simons, brother Alfred E. Simons, sister Ethel Simons Meeds, and his niece Anna Josephine Simons Wade.

Simons's correspondence with Herbert W. Bryant, A. F. Ford, L. R. Lines, and R. Baille Young and other material specifically related to his service with the YMCA is in the Young Men's Christian Association file. A file on the Young Women's Christian Association is mostly printed matter on YWCA activities in India compiled by Ruth Cowdrey.

The Simons and Garrett families of Columbia, South Carolina, were united in the 1917 marriage of Alfred E. Simons, younger brother of William H. Simons, and Mattie Phyllis Garrett, daughter of educator and journalist Caspar G. Garrett. One of the eight children resulting from this marriage was Ruth Simons Nicholson, a historian and archivist at the Library of Congress. Most of the Other Family Members series consists of the family correspondence among members of the Simons and Garrett families.

Much of the family correspondence in the [Other Family Members](#) series focuses on the military service of sons of Alfred and Minnie Simons during and immediately after World War II. Correspondents include Alfred E. Simons, Jr., who organized the swing/jazz band of the 357th Engineers Regiment and led it overseas in North Africa and Italy. He later became a prominent educational psychologist. William H. Simons (born 1924), wrote many letters home during his army service in the northern European theater. A file in the Miscellany of the Other Family Members series relates to his activities as an organizer and president of the Washington, D.C., Teachers Union.

Also of interest are letters of photographer Joseph O. Curtis (not a family member), who served as a junior officer in a quartermaster unit in England, France, and Belgium during World War II. The correspondence of Alfred E. Simons, Jr., William H. Simons, Joseph O. Curtis, and others documents the response of African-American soldiers to a segregated army.

Naomi Mills Garrett maintained a voluminous correspondence with her mother, Anna Mariah Garrett, wife of journalist Caspar G. Garrett; her sister, Mattie Garrett Simons; and her nieces, Ruth Simons Nicholson and Anna Josephine Simons Wade. She wrote about her experiences as a teacher in rural South Carolina during a period spanning World War I through the 1930s, in Haiti during World War II, and as a professor of romance languages at West Virginia State College, Institute, West Virginia, from the 1940s through the 1960s.

Though Alfred and Mattie Simons moved to Washington, D.C., shortly after their marriage in 1917, they maintained ties with their native state through correspondence and participation in the South Carolina Club. Files comprising the correspondence and minutes of the club can be found in the Miscellany of the Other Family Members series.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in two series:

- [William H. Simons \(1881-1938\), 1902-1940, n.d.](#)
- [Other Family Members, 1887-1982, n.d.](#)

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1-5

Series

William H. Simons (1881-1938), 1902-1940, n.d.

Diaries, correspondence, subject files, programs, clippings, printed matter, notes, receipts, passports, and miscellaneous material.

Organized into three groups, diaries, general correspondence, and miscellany, and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent, type of material, or subject.

BOX 6-15

Other Family Members, 1887-1982, n.d.

Correspondence, subject files, financial records, printed matter, and miscellaneous material.

Organized into three groups, family correspondence, general correspondence, and miscellany, and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent, type of material, or subject.

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<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-5	William H. Simons (1881-1938), 1902-1940, n.d. Diaries, correspondence, subject files, programs, clippings, printed matter, notes, receipts, passports, and miscellaneous material. Organized into three groups, diaries, general correspondence, and miscellany, and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent, type of material, or subject.
BOX 1	Diaries and diary notes, 1918-1922 (4 folders)
BOX 1	General correspondence
BOX 1	"A" miscellaneous, 1930-1938, n.d.
BOX 1	Bankole-Wright, Simeon, 1930-1932
BOX 1	"B" miscellaneous, 1918-1938, n.d.
BOX 1	Clark, William John, 1920-1937
BOX 1	Cowdrey, Mary H., 1921-1924, n.d.
BOX 1	Cowdrey, Ruth, 1925-1940, n.d. <i>See also Container 5, Young Women's Christian Association</i>
BOX 2	"C" miscellaneous, 1913-1935
BOX 2	Dawodu, T. O., 1924-3195
BOX 2	Diggs, Clara M. and Washington, 1931-1935
BOX 2	"D-F" miscellaneous, 1926-38, n.d. (2 folders)
BOX 2	Frost, Elizabeth R., 1931-1937
BOX 2	Gale, Kate E., 1917-1937
BOX 2	Grey, Eric V., 1930-1936
BOX 2	"G" miscellaneous, 1918-1935
BOX 2	Hannagold, Richard S., 1922-1938
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BOX 2	Mani, B. S., 1922-1925
BOX 2	Martin, Samuel W., 1931-1936
BOX 2	McLean, Annie L., 1933-3197
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BOX 3	Onosade, P. E., 1932-1938
BOX 3	Oyerinde, Nathaniel D., 1924-1926
BOX 3	"O" miscellaneous, 1928-1938
BOX 3	Peirson, Adelaide M., 1910-1931
BOX 3	Peoples Baptist Church, Boston, Mass., 1930-1937, n.d.
BOX 3	Poole, James C., 1936-1938
BOX 3	"P" miscellaneous, 1922-1933, n.d.
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William H. Simons (1881-1938), 1902-1940, n.d.

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BOX 3	Sadler, George W., 1930-1934, n.d.
BOX 3	Simons, Alfred E., 1906-1931
BOX 3	Simons, Evelyn E., 1914-1937
BOX 3	Simons, Isom W. and Minnie, 1902-1927, n.d.
BOX 3	Skeet, Benjamin, 1928-1937
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BOX 3	"S" miscellaneous, 1904-1935
BOX 4	"T-V" miscellaneous, 1921-1937, n.d.
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BOX 4	Walker, Elizabeth I., 1931-1934
BOX 4	Williams, Minnie Simons, 1922-1932
BOX 4	"W" miscellaneous and unidentified, 1904-1939
BOX 4	Miscellany
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BOX 4	American Baptist Foreign Mission School, Myingyam, Burma, 1923, n.d.
BOX 4	Gordon College, Boston, Mass., 1923-1937
BOX 4	Invitations and programs, 1910-1936, n.d.
BOX 4	Newspapers
BOX 4	African Standard, British East Africa, 1918
BOX 4	The Voice, Benedict College, Columbia, S.C., 1902, n.d.
BOX 4	Notes, 1915-1936, n.d. (3 folders)
BOX 5	Passports, 1917-1939
BOX 5	Postcards, 1905-1937, n.d.
BOX 5	Printed matter, 1914-1930, n.d.
BOX 5	Receipts, 1908-1937, n.d.
BOX 5	Verse, 1930, n.d.
BOX 5	Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
BOX 5	East African Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919, n.d.
BOX 5	India, Burma, Ceylon, 1918-1937, n.d. (2 folders)
BOX 5	United States, 1923-1930, n.d.
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BOX 6-15

Other Family Members, 1887-1982, n.d.

Correspondence, subject files, financial records, printed matter, and miscellaneous material. Organized into three groups, family correspondence, general correspondence, and miscellany, and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent, type of material, or subject.

BOX 6	Family correspondence
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BOX 6	Ferguson, Phyllis Simons, 1943-1947, n.d.
BOX 6	Garrett, Caspar G., 1920-1947, n.d.
BOX 6	Garrett, Caspar G., Jr., 1918-1950, n.d.
BOX 6	Garrett, Christopher T., 1920-1954, n.d.
BOX 6	Garrett, Colon H., 1921-1926, n.d.

Other Family Members, 1887-1982, n.d.

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Other Family Members, 1887-1982, n.d.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
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BOX 13	Williams, Lillian, 1920-1957
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