



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Bessye B. Bearden papers**

1922-1944

Sc MG 73

Processed by Debra Carter.

## Summary

**Creator:** Bearden, Bessye B., 1891-1943

**Title:** Bessye B. Bearden papers

**Date:** 1922-1944

**Source:** SCM76-14

**Abstract:** The papers mainly reflect Bearden's membership in and activities with several civic and political organizations, and consists of letters, speeches and printed material.

**Preferred citation:** Bessye B. Bearden papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Debra Carter; machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

## Creator History

Bessye J. Bearden was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1891, the youngest child of George and Carrie Banks. She attended local schools in North Carolina, Hartshorn Memorial College in Richmond, and Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute from which she graduated. In later years Mrs. Bearden did graduate work at the University of Western Pennsylvania and Columbia University.

At the age 20, Bessye Banks married R. Howard Bearden. They had one son, Romare, who became an internationally renowned artist.

Mrs. Bearden managed the New York office of the E. C. Brown Real Estate Company of Philadelphia for many years. She was also the New York representative for the Chicago *Defender*, starting in 1927, and did free lance writing for other publications. On June 11, 1935 Mrs. Bearden was appointed Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue, serving first in the Processing Division, and later, as an auditor. In 1922 she was the first black woman to be elected to local School Board No. 15 in New York City where she

served until 1939.

Mrs. Bearden was involved in numerous civic activities and belonged to several organizations, among them the New York Urban League, where she served as secretary of the executive board, the Council of Negro Women where she served as treasurer, and the executive boards of the Harlem Community Council and the Colored Women's Democratic League, of which she was the first president.

Mrs. Bearden died in September 1943 at Harlem Hospital in New York City.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Bessye J. Bearden Papers, 1922-1944, is a small collection which nevertheless reflects her membership in and activities with numerous civic and political organizations. While the papers consist mostly of incoming correspondence, there is also a small amount of personal papers and speeches.

**Arrangement:** Organized into three series: I Personal Papers; II Letters; and III Speeches

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American women -- New York (State) -- New York -- Political activity

African American women -- New York (State) -- New York -- Societies and clubs

African Americans -- New York (State) -- New York -- Societies, etc

Political clubs -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Speeches

### **Names**

Bearden, Bessye B., 1891-1943

Bearden, Bessye J., 1891-1943

Harlem Community Council

National Council of Negro Women

Urban League of Greater New York

## **Container List**

b. 1 f. 1 **Personal Papers 1931-1942**

The file includes one of Mrs. Bearden's resumes and an obituary.

**Correspondence**

The file consists of letters from the various organizations Mrs. Bearden was involved with and one folder of condolence letters sent to the family upon her death.

b. 1 f. 2 **1922-1939**

b. 1 f. 3 **1940-1942**

b. 1 f. 4 **1943-1944, n.d.**

b. 1 f. 5 **Condolences 1943, September**

b. 1 f. 5 **Speeches 1942-1943, n.d.**

The folder includes a newspaper article advertising a lecture-concert at which Mrs. Bearden introduced Mary McCleod Bethune and Mrs. Bethune in turn introduced Eleanor Roosevelt.