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Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

George Freeman Bragg manuscripts

undated

Sc MG 244

Processed by Hanna Bailey.

Summary

Creator: Bragg, George F. (George Freeman), 1863-1940

Title: George Freeman Bragg manuscripts

Date: undated

Source: Purchased from Lambeth Books, Summer 1986. SCM86-49

Abstract: The George Freeman Bragg Manuscripts consist primarily of biographical essays about three prominent nineteenth century African Americans in addition to two lists, the first providing names of famous African American women and the second, a list of people to be confirmed, presumably at St. James Episcopal Church. The biographical essays discuss such key figures as Daniel A. Payne, Blanche Kelso Bruce and John Mercer Langston. Other typescripts pertain to the history of African Americans in the Episcopal Church and the union of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Church.

Preferred citation: George Freeman Bragg manuscripts, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Hanna Bailey; machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

Creator History

Reverend George Freeman Bragg was born in 1863 in Warrenton, North Carolina. Soon after his birth his parents, George Freeman Sr. and Mary Bragg, moved the family to live with his grandmother, Caroline Wiley Bragg, in Petersburg, Virginia. Caroline Bragg, the former slave of an Episcopal priest, had four sons who had helped to establish an African American Episcopal Church in Petersburg. In 1879 Bragg entered the Theological School for Negroes in Petersburg, a branch of the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, in 1879. He was soon suspended however, by school officials who claimed he was "not humble enough." His suspension was most likely connected with his support of a political party called Readjuster, which advocated higher taxes for the rich. Bragg taught school in

Staunton, Virginia until he was allowed to return to the Theological School in 1885. He graduated in 1887, and married Nellie Hill with whom he had four children. In 1902 Wilberforce University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree.

Bragg was ordained a deacon of the Episcopal Church in 1887. One year later he became a priest and was assigned to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Norfolk, Virginia. In the three years he ministered there, the congregation grew and the church facilities improved because of his efforts. At this time Bragg also established the Industrial School for Colored Girls, and opened the Holy Innocents Mission.

In 1891 Bragg became rector of St. James' Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland. At that time St. James' had a sixty-nine member congregation and worshipped in a rented building. Within a few years Bragg raised enough money to buy land and to build a new church, and by 1931 the congregation had five hundred members. Bragg preached at St. James' for forty-nine years, until his death in 1940. Although a candidate for the bishopric more than once, Bragg was never appointed.

Bragg believed the Episcopal Church provided a forum where educated people could communicate across racial divisions. Although he was a candidate for the bishopric more than once, Bragg was never appointed. He spoke in opposition to discrimination within the church; as segregation spread however, he fought, unsuccessfully, to create an African American district and a position for an African American bishop within the Episcopal Diocese of Baltimore.

Bragg was an active member of many organizations outside of the church. In 1884 he was an honorary commissioner of the New Orleans Exposition. Between the years 1887 and 1891 he served as curator of the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institution, chaplain of the second battalion of the Colored Militia, and secretary of the National Colored Association. Beginning in 1892 he became the General Secretary of the Conference of Church Workers, a national organization of African American clergy and laymen. Bragg's most important accomplishment in Baltimore was the establishment of the Maryland Home for Friendless Colored Children (1899). This institution was noted for its progressive approach; it attempted to create a homey atmosphere and to place teen-agers in foster homes. In 1901, he became the first African American elected to the board of managers of the House of Reformation for Colored Boys, a position to which he was annually elected for several years. Bragg worked with Booker T. Washington to prevent disfranchisement in Maryland, but later joined W.E.B. DuBois' Niagara movement which opposed Washington's conservatism. He also led a movement in Baltimore to hire African American teachers for African American students.

Bragg edited and published several newspapers. He founded "*The Lancet*" in 1882, one of the first African American weekly papers. In 1886 he edited "*The Afro-American Churchman*" which later became the "*The Church Advocate*." He was also secretary of the National Colored Press Association. Aside from editing, Bragg wrote many books and over twenty pamphlets, most of which were published by the Church Advocate Press. His best known work, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (1922), was the first book written on this topic. Another book, *Men of Maryland* (1914), was the first study of African Americans in Maryland. "*The Hero of Jerusalem*" (1926) is an example of one of his pamphlets written in honor of General William Mahone. Many of his articles were published in "*The Church Advocate*."

In 1940, at the age of seventy-seven, Bragg died after a brief illness.

Most of the information in this biographical note was drawn from an article by J. Carleton Hayden

Scope and Content Note

The George Freeman Bragg Manuscripts consist of six typescripts, none of which are dated, and two lists. The first list provides names of famous African American women and the second, is a list of people to be confirmed, presumably at St. James Episcopal Church.

The typescripts range in length from six to fourteen pages. The majority are biographical essays of such prominent figures as Daniel A. Payne, Blanche Kelso Bruce and John Mercer Langston. Other typescripts pertain to the history of African Americans in the Episcopal Church ("*A Review*") and an explanation of the union of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Church ("*Ephesians*"). A few of the typescripts contain handwritten corrections and notations.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American clergy
African American Episcopalians
African Americans -- Religion
Clergy, Writings of

Titles

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Names

Bragg, George F. (George Freeman), 1863-1940
Bruce, Blanche Kelso, 1841-1898
Langston, John Mercer, 1829-1897
Payne, Daniel Alexander, 1811-1893
African Methodist Episcopal Church (Philadelphia, Pa.)
Episcopal Church

Container List

f. 1 Writings

"A Review," n.d.

"Ephesians," n.d.

"John Mercer Langston," n.d.

"Blanche Kelso Bruce," n.d.

"Daniel A. Payne," n.d.

"Allen Payne," n.d.

Lists n.d.