



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

Guide to the

**Lavinia Williams collection**

1954-1983

Sc MG 659

## Summary

**Creator:** Yarborough, Lavinia Williams

**Title:** Lavinia Williams collection

**Date:** 1954-1983

**Size:** 0.21 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Purchased from Willy Nicolas (dealer), April 1999.

**Abstract:** Lavinia Williams (1916-1989) was an African-American dancer, choreographer, and teacher. This collection contains materials such as dance instruction (class) notes, personal correspondence, and professional correspondence, the last of which pertains to Ballets d'Haiti performances and dance education. Included are two booklets written by Williams.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Lavinia Williams collection, Sc MG 659, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Accessioned by L.J. Sewell, June 1999.

## Creator History

Lavinia Williams (1916-1989) was an African American dancer, choreographer, and teacher. Williams was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and later resided in Brooklyn, New York, and Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She danced with Katherine Dunham's company and appeared in various Broadway musicals such as *Showboat* and *Cabin in the Sky*. In 1953, Williams was invited by the Haitian government to establish a dance school in Haiti. She went on to found the Haitian Institute of Classic and Folklore Dance of which she was the director.

Williams also founded the Ballets d'Haiti dance company. She would later divide her time between Haiti and the United States. During the latter years of her life (in the 1980s), she taught at New York University and the Alvin Ailey Dance School. Like many African American dancers of her generation, Williams had begun to receive recognition from the younger generation of dancers, scholars, and the

general public. The dance tradition continued through Sara Yarborough, Williams's daughter, who was a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

## **Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains materials such as dance instruction (class) notes, personal correspondence from her daughter, Sara Yarborough, and general and professional correspondence pertaining to Ballets d'Haiti performances and dance education. Included are two booklets written by Williams. One booklet, entitled *Haitian Dance*, focuses on cultural dance while the other commemorates the 20th anniversary of Ballets d'Haiti. This collection also includes a program from a dance performance and other material related to Williams's involvement in dance education.

**Arrangement:** Arranged in two series: I. Personal and II. Professional

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American dance  
Ballet dancers -- Haiti  
Dance -- Haiti  
Dance companies -- Haiti  
Dance, Black  
Folk dancing -- Haiti  
Women dancers

### **Names**

Yarborough, Lavinia Williams  
Yarborough, Sara

## Container List

### Personal 1969-1983

- b. 1 f. 1 Yarborough, Sara correspondence 1969-1983
- b. 1 f. 2 Class notes and scripts

### Professional 1954-1984

#### Correspondence

##### General

- b. 1 f. 3 1954-1969
- b. 1 f. 4 1970-1979
- b. 1 f. 5 1980-1984
- b. 1 f. 6 Invitations 1966-1977
- b. 1 f. 7 Cards

##### Professional

- b. 1 f. 8 Performance opportunities 1970-1983
- b. 1 f. 9 Acknowledgements 1971-1979
- b. 1 f. 10 Dance instruction 1971-1983
- b. 1 f. 11 Contracts 1973-1980
- b. 1 f. 12 Awards 1976

#### Writing

- b. 1 f. 13 *Booklets, Haiti-Dance and "Ballets D'Haiti Bamboche Creole 20th Anniversary"* ca. 1970
- b. 1 f. 14 Printed matter on dance instruction 1961-1983