



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

Guide to the

Frederick W. Wells papers

1924

Sc MG 203

Summary

Creator: Wells, Frederick W. (Frederick Wilson), 1896-1979

Title: Frederick W. Wells papers

Date: 1924

Size: 82 items (2 folders)

Source: Gift, Wells, Jennie A, 1983

Abstract: The Frederick W. Wells Papers consist of letters, telegrams and newspaper clippings documenting a crossburning incident by the Ku Klux Klan as part of an effort by white students to have Wells, an African American Columbia University School of Law student, removed from his on-campus dormitory. The collection dates from January through May of 1924 and consists primarily of 61 letters of support from organizations, friends and members of the public, both black and white. The letters came from supporters primarily in the United States, although the West Indies is also represented. Letter writers include: William M. Ashby, Executive Secretary of the New Jersey Urban League; J. B. Matthews, President of the Wilberforce Club of Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Rev. John W. Robinson of St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City; and Jedediah Tingle, philanthropist. A letter from the Dean of the Law School, Herbert E. Hawkes, reassured Wells' father, Charles W. Wells, that safety precautions were being taken to protect his son.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Frederick W. Wells papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Frederick W. Wells was an attorney and housing specialist in New York City. He was born in Tennessee, attended Wilberforce University, then Yale Law School, and later was a senior at Columbia University Law School. In 1924 he was assigned a dormitory room in Furnald Hall at Columbia University. Initially, white students assumed he was a janitor. When some white students from Kentucky associated with the Ku Klux Klan learned that Wells was a student, they circulated petitions for his removal from the dormitory. This was followed by death threats and a cross burning on the lawn outside Furnald Hall.

Newspapers throughout the country headlined the story. The Dean of Columbia University's Law School, Herbert E. Hawkes supported Wells' residency on campus, as did many other Columbia University students.

Upon completion of his law studies, Wells worked as Industrial Secretary for the Urban League in California and directed his attention to housing for the disadvantaged and the African American poor. He later organized his own real estate managing and consulting firm in New York City. Working with city agencies, his efforts were instrumental in the building of Lenox Terrace and Delano Village in Harlem and the Carnes McKinney Apartments, a cooperative building in the Bronx.

Scope and Content Note

The Frederick W. Wells Papers consist of letters, telegrams and newsclippings documenting a crossburning incident by the Ku Klux Klan as part of an effort by white students to have Wells, an African American Columbia University School of Law student, removed from his on-campus dormitory. The collection dates from January through May of 1924 and consists primarily of 61 letters of support from organizations, friends and members of the public, both black and white. The letters came from supporters primarily in the United States, although the West Indies is also represented. Letter writers include: William M. Ashby, Executive Secretary of the New Jersey Urban League; J. B. Matthews, President of the Wilberforce Club of Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Rev. John W. Robinson of St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City; and Jedediah Tingle, philanthropist. A letter from the Dean of the Law School, Herbert E. Hawkes, reassured Wells' father, Charles W. Wells, that safety precautions were being taken to protect his son.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American college students -- New York (State) -- New York
African Americans -- Civil rights -- New York (State) -- New York
Race discrimination -- New York (State) -- New York
Race relations in school management -- New York (State) -- New York

Titles

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

Names

Wells, Frederick W. (Frederick Wilson), 1896-1979
Ashby, William M. (William Mobile), 1889-
Hawkes, Herbert E. (Herbert Edwin), 1872-1943
Matthews, J. B. (Joseph Brown), 1894-
Robinson, John W., Ph.D.
Tingle, Jedediah
Wells, Charles W
Columbia University. School of Law
Ku Klux Klan (1915-)