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

Guide to the

**A. Newell Johnson papers**

1920s-1980s [bulk 1950s-1970s]

Sc MG 503

Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2015

## Summary

**Creator:** Johnson, Alfred Newell, 1915-1989

**Title:** A. Newell Johnson papers

**Date:** 1920s-1980s [bulk 1950s-1970s]

**Size:** 33.27 linear feet (78 boxes, 1 volume)

**Source:** Donated by Leah Wise, 2014.

**Abstract:** Alfred Newell Johnson (1915-1989) was an entrepreneur whose work varied from electrical engineering, journalism, photography, public relations and publicity, to political campaign management. The A. Newell Johnson papers date from the 1920s to the 1980s (bulk dates 1950s-1970s) and contain correspondence, notes, articles, reports, clippings, photographs, audiovisual materials, and ephemera that document his many endeavors and engagements.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2015

## Creator History

Alfred Newell Johnson (1915-1989) was an entrepreneur who pursued many endeavors from electrical engineering, journalism, photography, public relations and publicity, to political campaign management. Johnson, who went by his middle name, grew up in Oakland, California. He served in the United States Navy, and attended the U.S. Navy Radio Material School. He studied electrical engineering at the University of California at Berkeley (1946-1949); and also received training in stenography, radio operation, and x-ray technology. Johnson and his wife had four children, before divorcing in 1950.

In the 1930s, Johnson was an operator for amateur radio, and ran Johnson Electronic Engineering Laboratories. From 1954 to 1959, Johnson edited the weekly entertainment page for the *Sun Reporter*, based in San Francisco, California. He was also a staff engineer at KQED-TV, an educational television station in San Francisco (1957-1959). In 1954, he founded Newell Johnson & Associates, a public relations and publicity firm that handled events for the National Baptist Convention and the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority; public relations for blues singer B.B. King; and a west coast tour featuring singer and actor Paul Robeson. He served as a representative for gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, arranging her concert appearances on the west coast; and also took care of personal affairs for artists such as Josephine Baker when they appeared in the Bay Area.

In 1959, Johnson moved to the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City. While in New York, he worked as an event photographer; x-ray technician; assistant director of public information at HARYOU-ACT (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited merged with Associated Community Teams); training coordinator, instructor, and director of photography at Morningside Parents Association; and councilman aide to Fred Samuel. In the 1980s, he was a campaign manager for the Mississippi politician Addie Green; field supervisor for the Harlem Fire Safety Program; and a secretary for the Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church.

Additionally, Johnson was active in the Harlem community through the Abyssinian Baptist Church (Member of the Progressive Men's Usher Board); the New York branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, member and chairperson of the community coordination committee); and the Negro American Labor Union.

Johnson died of cancer in 1989.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The A. Newell Johnson papers date from the 1920s to the 1980s (bulk dates 1950s-1970s) and consist of correspondence, notes, articles, reports, clippings, photographs, audiovisual materials, and ephemera.

The collection is made up of various subjects that collectively document Johnson's professional endeavors, personal relationships, and interest in the advancement of black people. The more prominent files relate to the Abyssinian Baptist and Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Churches; electrical and radio engineering; news writing; politics; and public relations and publicity.

Church materials contain Johnson's audio recordings of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s sermons at the Abyssinian Baptist Church; and programs from their Sunday worship services, special church events, and Powell's funeral (1972). There are copies of *The Abyssinian* publication, including the 1964 September edition that featured the "Inspiration in Mississippi" article written by Johnson (box 7, folder 10). Johnson's work as secretary of the Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church is documented through meeting minutes, the *Concerns of the Church* newsletters, and information on the 1980s

church merger.

Electrical and Radio Engineering files hold Johnson's course work, including the "Mobile Two-Way Radio" report (box 31, folder 10), and the rhombic antenna design notes (box 31, folder 11). Further studies are accounted for through manuals, diagrams, and notes on topics such as communication receivers, power supplies, transmission, and soldering. There are also Johnson Electronics Engineering Laboratories business correspondence, bill statements, and lab building plans.

News Writing primarily recounts Johnson's editorial work at the *Sun Reporter* through a few letters from other editors; publicity stills from various entertainers; handwritten drafts and typewritten versions of his Mambo Roundups on weekly entertainment happenings; preparatory notes for an interview with Lena Horne in 1955 (box 52, folder 6); and some clippings of his printed articles.

Politics reflect Johnson's support of certain candidates, and his work on a few political campaigns. Featured are ephemera from Powell's campaigns; and correspondence, flyers, photos, and notes from Addie Green's campaign. Within the collection, some of the political materials overlap with civil rights activism items, demonstrated through the photographs of a Harlem march for Selma, Alabama; and Martin Luther King, Jr. with Powell at Abyssinian. Johnson's NAACP membership is reflected through newsletters, memos, meeting agendas, and his conference reports.

Public Relations and Publicity files detail Johnson's attempts to secure and maintain clients. There are drafts of the article "We Found Gold on that Gold Coast" by musician Louis Armstrong and his wife (as told to Johnson); and the subsequent correspondence from Armstrong's press agent and personal manager negating an informal publicity arrangement Johnson supposedly made with Armstrong. The public relations work done for musician B.B. King is noted through information sheets, letters King sent introducing Johnson, press releases, expense statements, and correspondence regarding King's request to be released from their agreement. Johnson's publicity work for Mahalia Jackson is documented through a draft of a six-month campaign, and a photo of the two together. Also included are Zeta Phi Beta Sorority convention materials, and photocopies of a couple of letters written to Johnson from entertainer Josephine Baker.

The Harlem Fire Safety Program and the Morningside Parents Association files represent Johnson's work with various community organizations. There are information sheets, workshop manuals, and financial records from the Harlem Fire Safety Program; and syllabi, session outlines, lesson plans, and memos from Johnson's Morningside Parents Association courses. Present are also correspondence, articles, and notes related to the HARYOU-ACT organization.

Additionally, the personal papers contain notes about Johnson's life, family photographs and films, and correspondence. There are outgoing romantic letters; letters from his brother Eldridge Johnson; letters from his sister Cleodel Russell; letters from his wife Eleanor Johnson; and an ongoing exchange with his daughters once they were adults.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged alphabetically by subject.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American churches  
African Americans -- Politics and government -- 20th century  
Black newspapers

Electrical engineering  
Entrepreneurship  
Minorities in journalism  
Politics and culture

**Occupations**

African American politicians  
Black Journalists  
Civil rights workers, Black  
Community activists  
Radio engineers

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Articles  
Audiovisual materials  
Clippings (information artifacts)  
Correspondence  
notes  
Photographs  
Printed ephemera  
Reports

**Geographic Names**

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)

**Names**

Green, Addie Lee  
Powell, A. Clayton (Adam Clayton), 1865-1953  
Samuel, Frederick E., 1924-1985  
Abyssinian Baptist Church (New York, N.Y.)  
Harlem Fire Safety Program (New York, N.Y.)  
HARYOU-ACT (Organization)  
Morningside Parents Association (New York, N.Y.)  
Mt. Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church (New York, N.Y.)  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
Sun Reporter Newspaper (San Francisco, Calif.)

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-12 **Africa, Black Culture, and History 1936-1980s**  
Informational brochures, articles, and notes on African countries. Notes and flyers for an African history lecture series. Surveys on black demographics. Small black literature publications such as *Onyx Magazine*.
- b. 2 f. 1-15 **Africa, Black Culture, and History 1949-1980s**
  - b. 78 **African History Course 1983**  
Loose index cards.
  - b. 76 f. 7 **Business and Identification Cards 1950s-1980s**  
From various organizations.
  - b. 3 f. 1-2 **Calendars and To Do Lists 1974-1986**  
Professional, social, and personal engagements.
  - b. 3 f. 3-5 **Census 1980**  
Materials related to Johnson's work as a enumerator crew leader.
- Churches**
  - b. 3 f. 6-8 **1950s**
  - b. 4 f. 1-10 **1950s-1980s**
  - b. 5 f. 1-10 **1960s-1980s**
  - b. 6 f. 1-9 **1980s**
    - Abyssinian Baptist Church**
      - b. 7 f. 1-12 **1960s-1980s**
    - origsr.229513 **Powell, Adam Clayton 1960s**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
    - origsr.229514 **Powell, Adam Clayton 1970**  
Communion Sunday, and report from Jackson, Mississippi  
Sound recording (unavailable)
    - b. 8 f. 1-15 **California - Ministers Project 1959-1980s**
    - b. 9 f. 1-12 **Ministry - Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church 1970s-1980s**
    - b. 10 f. 1-11 **Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church 1982-1984**
    - origsr.229512 **National San Francisco Baptist -- Dr. Jackson Sunday Sermon 1959**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
    - origsr.229511 **Reverend F.D 1980s**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
    - origsr.229510 **Reverend Gunn, Lenton Interview 1989**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
    - origsr.229509 **Reverend Licorisit -- Easter 1969**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
  - Civil Rights Activism**
    - b. 10 f. 12-15 **1950s-1971**
    - b. 10 f. 16-17 **Johnson's Civil Rights Writings - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) 1950s-1960s**
      - NAACP**
        - b. 11 f. 1-9 **1956-1980**
        - b. 12 f. 1-10 **1970s-1980s**
        - b. 13 f. 1-11 **1977-1980s**

Civil Rights Activism (cont.)  
NAACP (cont.)

- b. 14 f. 1-12 **Benefit Concert - National Conventions 1955-1980s**
- b. 76 f. 6 **Buttons and Realia 1960s-1980s**
- origsr.229516 **Freedom Fund Dinner -- Gallagher, Guell G 1975**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- b. 15 f. 1-6 **National Conventions - State Correspondence 1970s**
- b. 15 f. 7-8 **Politics and Activism - Powell and Martin Luther King, Jr. Photos 1965-1980s**
- b. 16 f. 1-2 **Powell, MLK, Malcolm X Photos - Randolph, A. Phillip 1965-1979**

**Clubs, Unions, and Other Organizations**

- origsr.229515 **138 Black Association 1970s**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- b. 16 f. 3-13 **369 Veterans - Black Social Workers 1959-1980s**
- b. 17 f. 1-10 **Elks - Local 1199 Union 1942-1980s**
- b. 18 f. 1-17 **Local 1199 Union - Women's Clubs 1928-1987**

**Electrical and Radio Engineering**

- b. 19 f. 1-15 **Aeronautical - Engineering Education and Layout 1940s-1960s**
- b. 20 f. 1-8 **Equipment - Federal Communications Commission (FCC) 1943-1960s**
- b. 21 f. 1-11 **FCC - Institute of Radio Engineers 1939-1968**
- b. 22 f. 1-8 **Intergrated Circuits - International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) 1940s-1960s**
- b. 23 f. 1-14 **International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE) 1957-1960s**
- b. 24 f. 1-8 **IUE - Johnson Electronics Engineering Laboratories 1948-1960s**
- b. 25 f. 1-14 **Johnson Electronics Engineering Laboratories - Loral 1950s-1973**
- b. 26 f. 1-17 **Loral - Projector 1950s-1970s**
- b. 27 f. 1-13 **Power Supplies - Radio Engineering 1950s-1979**
- b. 28 f. 1-11 **Radio Engineering - KQED Channel 9 1950s-1960s**
- b. 29 f. 1-12 **KQED - Ralston Study File 1940s-1960s**
- b. 30 f. 1-15 **Reports - Transistors 1950s-1970s**

**Telco**

- origsr.229518 **1970s**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- origsr.229517 **1974**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- origsr.229519 **1974**  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- b. 31 f. 1-16 **Transistors - XMFR Connections 1930s-1970s**
- b. 32 f. 1-3 **Employment 1940s-1970s**  
Including applications, resumes, and letters of empolyment.
- b. 32 f. 4 **Expense Ledger 1980s**
- b. 32 f. 5 **File Guide 1950s**  
Lists from Johnson's file cabinets.
- b. 32 f. 6 **Funeral Directory 1954-1955**

## Harlem

Various cultural events; community programs and organizations; and Johnson's notebooks on Harlem, including the "Save Harlem Taskforce" notes in box 37.

- b. 32 f. 7-9 1960s-1980s
- b. 76 f. 1 1960s-1980s  
Buttons from various Harlem community organizations.
- b. 32 f. 10-11 138 Street Block Association - Activism, Culture, and Community 1960s-1980s
- b. 33 f. 1-11 Activism, Culture, and Community 1950s-1980s
- b. 34 f. 1-11 Community 1970s-1980s
- b. 35 f. 1-10 Community, Culture, and Politics 1960s-1980s
- b. 36 f. 1-18 Community Life - Minisink 1949-1980s
- b. 37 f. 1-9 Notebooks - United Block Association 1966-1983

## Harlem Fire Safety Program

- b. 38 f. 1-11 1983-1985
- b. 39 f. 1-3 1985
- b. 39 f. 4-10 Accounting - Ledger 1984-1985
- b. 40 f. 1-12 Letters - Youth Bureau Instructions 1982-1985

## HARYOU-ACT

- b. 40 f. 13-14 1964
- b. 41 f. 1-10 1968-1970s
- b. 42 f. 1-5 1971-1981
- b. 42 f. 6-13 Arts and Culture - Media List 1969-1970s
- b. 43 f. 1-16 Media and Organization Lists - Young, John 1950s-1981
- b. 43 f. 17-18 Ledger 1960s  
Personal and professional.

## Morningside Parents Association

- b. 44 f. 1-11 1970s-1980s
- b. 45 f. 1-7 1980
- b. 45 f. 8-16 Adult Education - Chemistry Class 1970s-1980s
- b. 46 f. 1-28 Christmas - Students' Work 1978-1980
- b. 47 f. 1-8 Summer Youth Festival - Youth Program 1978-1980

## News Writing

- b. 47 f. 9-15 ANP - National Negro Press 1955-1958
- b. 48 f. 1-10 *Negro Press - Sun Reporter* 1948-1950s  
*Sun Reporter*
- b. 49 f. 1-9 1955-1960s
- b. 49 f. 10-12 America's Singer Association - Artists 1950s
- b. 50 f. 1-15 Artist Interviews - Cole, Nat King 1950s
- b. 51 f. 1-13 Concert Artists - Entertainment Roundup 1950s
- b. 52 f. 1-15 Entertainment Roundup - Mambo Roundup 1946-1950s
- b. 53 f. 1-15 Mambo Roundup - San Francisco 1950s
- b. 54 f. 1-11 San Francisco - Zeta Phi Beta 1950s-1970s

### Personal

- b. 54 f. 12-13 1940s-1980s
- b. 55 f. 1-8 1950s-1970s
- b. 76 f. 2 1970s-1980s  
Photographic negatives.
- b. 56 f. 1-5 1970s-1980s
- origf.229520 1980s  
Film (unavailable)
- origf.229521 1980s  
Film (unavailable)
- b. 56 f. 6-9 Autobiographical Outline - Cards 1970s-1980
- origf.229522 California Summer 1971-1976  
Film (unavailable)
- b. 57 f. 1-13 Cards - Correspondence 1930s-1980s
- b. 58 f. 1-13 Correspondence 1922-1980s
- b. 59 f. 1-7 Correspondence 1933-1974
- b. 60 f. 1-18 Correspondence - Household Budget 1945-1980s
- origf.229524 Harlem Day / Newellene at Bubbling Brown Sugar 1977  
Film (unavailable)
- b. 61 f. 1-10 Insurance - Photographs 1940s-1980s
- origf.229525 Museum 1970s  
Film (unavailable)
- origsr.229526 Mystery Phone Call 1982  
"While I was at Cypress"  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- b. 62 f. 1-5 Photographs - Work Plans 1950s-1980s
- origsr.229527 San Francisco Tape 1955  
E. Jackie Ford. Hamilton Center  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- origsr.229528 Teenage Thieves at 833 Shattuck Avenue 1959-1960  
Sound recording (unavailable)
- v. 1 Whitmore, Naomi Golphin 1972  
Scrapbook.
- origf.229532 World Trade Center -- Newellene and Carl Lawrence 1977  
Film (unavailable)
- ### Zoo
- origf.229529 1970s  
Film (unavailable)
- origf.229530 1970s  
Film (unavailable)
- origf.229523 Connie's Kids at Park After Zoo 1970s  
Film (unavailable)
- origf.229531 Josetta, Shawn, Amos, Little Connie 1970s  
Film (unavailable)
- ### Politics
- b. 62 f. 6-12 1936-1960s



Politics (cont.)

- b. 63 f. 1-10 1960s-1980s
- b. 76 f. 3-5 1960s-1980s  
Buttons.
- b. 77 1960s-1980s  
Buttons on loose sashes.
- b. 64 f. 1-9 1960s-1980s
- b. 64 f. 10-11 Alfred Isaacs Democratic Club 1960s-1970s
- b. 65 f. 1-16 Black Democrats - Green, Addie 1940s-1980s
- origf.229533 Green, Addie 1980s  
Haryou in NYC; Mississippi  
Film (unavailable)
- b. 66 f. 1-15 Green, Addie - National Black Political Convention 1954-1985
- b. 67 f. 1-10 New York State Constitutional Convention - Powell, Adam Clayton, Jr 1958-1980s
- b. 68 f. 1-14 Powell, Adam Clayton, Jr. - Samuel, Fred 1966-1980s
- b. 69 f. 1-6 Samuel, Fred - Voting Precincts 1976-1980s
- Public Relations and Publicity
- b. 69 f. 7 1976-1979
- b. 69 f. 8-14 Alpha Phi Alpha - Armstrong, Louis 1950s-1980s
- b. 70 f. 1-23 Artist Management - Jackson, Mahalia 1932-1975
- b. 71 f. 1-17 Johnson, Newell - Morehouse College 1950s
- b. 72 f. 1-11 National Association of Colored Women's Club - Publicity Proposal 1950s-1980s
- b. 73 f. 1-16 Robeson, Paul - Stewart, Lucille Norman 1950s-1970s
- b. 74 f. 1-11 Stockton - Zeta Phi Beta 1950s-1981
- b. 75 f. 1-7 Zeta Phi Beta 1958-1975
- b. 78 Rolodex 1960s-1980s  
Loose index cards.
- b. 75 f. 8-9 Taxi and Limousine 1950s-1970s  
Materials related to Johnson's work as a hack driver.
- b. 75 f. 10-13 United States Armed Forces 1940s-1960s  
Related to Johnson's service in the Navy.