



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

Guide to the

**Frank R. Crosswaith papers**

1917-1965 [bulk 1923-1939]

Sc MG 100

Processed by Janice Quinter.

## Summary

**Creator:** Crosswaith, Frank Rudolph, 1892-1965

**Title:** Frank R. Crosswaith papers

**Date:** 1917-1965 [bulk 1923-1939]

**Source:** Gift of Richard Parrish, March 17, 1977 SCM 78-12 Gift of Mrs. Beatrice Parrish, August-September 1983 SCM 83-23

**Abstract:** The Frank R. Crosswaith Papers document aspects of his involvement as a labor leader and socialist and consist primarily of Crosswaith's speeches; scrapbooks containing papers regarding his activities, particularly the Socialist Party and the Negro Labor Committee; and news clippings. Biographical information and papers documenting dinners held in his honor are included.

**Preferred citation:** Frank R. Crosswaith papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Janice Quinter; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

**Separated Materials:**

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Paper Frank R. Crosswaith Papers

*Accession Number*SCM78-12, SCM83-23

Donor: Richard Parrish, Mrs. Beatrice Parrish

*Date received:*March 17 1977, Aug. - Sept. 1983

*Date transferred:*Dec. 22, 1992

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

*span class="emph">Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:/span>*

1 folder of photographs of Frank Crosswaith and colleagues

1 folder of photomechanicals

*Accessioned by:*Janice Quinter

*Date:*Dec. 22, 1992

### **Related Materials:**

The Negro Labor Committee Records located in the Schomburg Center contain information about Crosswaith's involvement with the NLC and with other organizations, such as the New York City Housing Authority.

### **Creator History**

Frank R. Crosswaith was a lifelong socialist, a labor union organizer, editor, and socialist candidate for several New York State offices. During the 1920's and 1930's he was one of the most effective organizers of black workers in New York City.

Born in St. Croix, Crosswaith immigrated to this country at age thirteen. Like many other Caribbean immigrants he had begun acquiring socialist ideas as an adolescent. He attended the Rand School of Social Science, a labor and socialist school, and later became a lecturer there. In 1922 he was Secretary of the People's Educational Forum in New York City where liberals of national importance addressed black audiences. And, in 1923 he served as chairman of a meeting held in Harlem to honor the labor and socialist leader, Eugene V. Debs.

Crosswaith was known as the Socialist Party's foremost black orator, and ran for various offices on the American Labor Party and Socialist tickets. In 1924 he was Norman Thomas' running mate, seeking the office of Secretary of State when Thomas ran for governor. Other offices he sought include Congressman (several times between 1922 and 1934), lieutenant governor (1932), City Council (1939), and president of the Board of Aldermen of New York City.

Crosswaith's first job in New York was as an elevator operator. As a laborer he understood and shared the difficulties and low wages of a significant portion of blacks in the teens and 1920's period who were employed in domestic and service positions. In 1925 he founded and served as executive secretary of the American Federation of Labor Trade Union Committee for Organizing Negro Workers, at a time when the AFL excluded most black workers, skilled and unskilled. As executive secretary, Crosswaith worked with most of the unions that had blacks in their industries, including elevator operators, barbers, mechanics, laundry workers, and motion picture operators.

The Labor Trade Union Committee for Organizing Negro Workers was succeeded in 1934 by the Harlem Labor Committee of which he served as chairman for many years. This organization, which appealed to black and white workers, was active in seeking higher wages, better working conditions

and improved fringe benefits. Crosswaith was also instrumental in organizing the First Negro Labor Conference, held in July 1935, which was held under the auspices of the Harlem Labor Committee. The purpose of the Conference was to consider the economic plight of the black worker and to develop a program of action to secure non-menial jobs for black workers. The Committee also encouraged solidarity of black and white workers.

The Conference established the Negro Labor Committee in 1935, with Crosswaith as chairman. The Committee sought to organize unorganized black workers and to lend its support to unions engaged in organizing and strike activities among black workers. It also established the *Negro Labor News Service* which disseminated information to newspapers on events about or relating to black labor throughout the country. Crosswaith was its editor for twelve years. The Committee maintained the Harlem Labor Center, established in 1935, which served as a headquarters for trade unions in Harlem, bringing together many black workers, who, because of economic conditions, had a newly aroused interest in trade unions.

Crosswaith was also well-known for his work as a special organizer for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which struggled for ten years to win the right to represent the Pullman porters and maids. He worked with the Brotherhood for three years until his resignation in 1928. His reasons for resigning included his perception of numerous irregularities in the internal finances of the Brotherhood which were detrimental to the members. Crosswaith felt undermined by Roy Lancaster, the Secretary-Treasurer, but he was unable to bring about changes in office procedures which he felt were sacrificing the goals of the membership. In addition, for over thirty years Crosswaith was on the staff of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). As general organizer, he established as its principal goal working through those AFL trade unions that were seeking to organize black workers. He was also one of the organizers of the original March on Washington Movement (1941), under A. Philip Randolph.

In 1942 Crosswaith was appointed the first labor member of the five member Board of the New York City Housing Authority by Mayor LaGuardia, and was successively reappointed by Mayors O'Dwyer and Impellitteri, serving as the Commissioner until 1957. The Housing Authority was responsible for building and operating public housing and was involved in redevelopment and slum clearance.

As a socialist organizer and lecturer for the League for Industrial Democracy and later as a national organizer for the ILGWU in the 1930's, Crosswaith travelled across the United States addressing multiracial labor groups, college students and other groups discussing labor and socialist issues. He was outspoken as an anti-communist, espousing his viewpoint that communists felt he was "a stumbling block in their campaign to organize the negro population of the United States." He believed strongly that black workers should follow socialist practices to achieve freedom and economic viability, and his professional life was devoted to furthering the cause of labor and the rights of blacks.

Jones, James T. *Crosswaith, Frank Rudolph*. In: *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* edited by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, 142-144. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Frank R. Crosswaith Papers date from 1917 to 1974. The papers document aspects of his involvement as a labor leader and socialist and consist primarily of Crosswaith's speeches; scrapbooks containing documentation regarding his activities, particularly the Socialist Party and the Negro Labor Committee; and news clippings. Biographical information and material documenting tributes held in his honor are included. The collection is relatively small and contains very little of substance in the Labor

and Politics series regarding trade union involvement with the exception of Crosswaith's writings and speeches. Much of the collection consists of printed material and speeches. Day-to-day office files for organizations with which he held significant positions are not included in this collection.

The Papers have been divided into three series. They are: Personal Papers, Labor and Politics, and Writings.

**Arrangement:** Papers organized into three series: I. Personal Papers; II. Labor and Politics; III. Writings

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American labor leaders  
African American labor union members  
African American orators  
African Americans -- Employment  
Labor unions -- United States -- Organizing  
Socialists -- United States

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Speeches

### **Names**

Crosswaith, Frank Rudolph, 1892-1965  
Harlem Labor Center (New York, N.Y.)  
Harlem Labor Committee (New York, N.Y.)  
Negro Labor Committee  
Socialist Party (U.S.)

## Container List

### Personal Papers

The *PERSONAL PAPERS series, 1917-1962 (.2 lin. ft.)* consists of several biographical sketches, organizational membership cards, certificates, and information about several dinners honoring him between 1937 and 1962.

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical Information
- b. 1 f. 2 Personal Papers 1928-1938, 1951
- b. 1 f. 3 Autograph Collection
- b. 1 f. 4 Organizational Membership Cards, Certificates 1917-1946
- b. 1 f. 5 Dinners Honoring Crosswaith 1932-1951  
70th Birthday Dinner Honoring Crosswaith
- b. 1 f. 6 Correspondence 1962
- b. 1 f. 7 Printed Matter 1962
- b. 1 f. 8 Personal Correspondence 1918-1941 1952
- b. 1 f. 9 Ethelred Brown - Memorial Service, Meeting 1957
- b. 1 f. 10 Miscellaneous Organizational Letterhead

### Labor and Politics

*LABOR AND POLITICS, 1922-1974 (1 lin. ft.)* The material about labor unions includes two scrapbooks which relate to his involvement with the Harlem Labor Committee and its Harlem Labor Center. This material includes by-laws, anniversary journals and related correspondence, press releases, and minutes of meetings. There is also a program for the First Negro Labor Conference which established the Negro Labor Committee, as well as articles written by Crosswaith and printed matter about the unionization of specific trades. The scrapbooks have been disbound but the original order has been maintained.

Organizations with which Crosswaith was involved as a labor organizer which are represented in the collection include the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (one folder contains minutes of executive meetings and Crosswaith's 1928 letters of resignation addressed to members of the Brotherhood explaining the reasons for his departure). The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union is documented by three folders which appear in three different sections of the Labor and Politics series, including in the two scrapbooks. This material consists primarily of news clippings and other printed matter, in addition to articles he wrote. Material in the scrapbooks include speeches and articles Crosswaith wrote, news clippings and other printed matter as well as typed versions of his editorials.

Subject files include barbers, laundry workers and other unions.

Crosswaith's political campaigns as a Socialist candidate are represented by news clippings, flyers and correspondence. There is additional correspondence about Eugene V. Debs, the socialist candidate for whom Crosswaith campaigned in 1923. Crosswaith's tenure with the New York City Housing Authority is represented by only two bulletins from 1957. Because he was appointed by mayors, the NYCHA material has been placed in this series.

There are a large number of news clippings about labor, including the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and A. Philip Randolph, and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Many of these articles discuss Crosswaith. Additional clippings focus on several of his New York City political campaigns. Oversize news clippings had been photocopied prior to the Schomburg Center's acquisition of the collection. Some of these photocopies contain articles about several related subjects which appear on the front and reverse sides.

### Negro Labor Committee

- b. 2 f. 1 By-laws 1968
- b. 2 f. 2 1929-1938
- b. 2 f. 3 Anniversary Journal and Related Correspondence 1937-1938
- b. 2 f. 4 1955-1974

Labor and Politics (cont.)

Harlem Labor Committee

- b. 2 f. 5 Report 1934-1935
- b. 2 f. 6 Negro Labor Conference Program 1935
- b. 2 f. 7 Printed Matter
- b. 2 f. 8 Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters 1924-1928, 1937
- b. 2 f. 9 Dressmakers International Ball - Program 1935
- b. 2 f. 10 International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union 1934-1935
- b. 2 f. 11 Negro American Labor Council - Constitution 1960
- b. 2 f. 12 Peoples' Educational Forum - Printed Material
- b. 2 f. 13 Unions - Correspondence, Articles 1920-1925
- b. 2 f. 14 Union Literature 1933-1937
- b. 2 f. 15 Poems Written about Labor 1923-1934, n.d.
- b. 2 f. 16 Labor - Correspondence 1926-1938
- b. 2 f. 17 New York City Housing Authority 1951-1957
- b. 2 f. 18 Discrimination in Housing - Letters 1943-1957
- b. 2 f. 19 Crosswaith's Political Campaigns 1922-1937
- b. 2 f. 20 Eugene V. Debs 1923
- b. 2 f. 21 Socialist Party - Printed Matter
- b. 2 f. 22 *James O'Neal (The New Leader)* 1925  
Socialism - Correspondence 1920-1936  
Scrapbook 1 - Labor
- b. 3 f. 1 Harlem Labor Committee - Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters 1937
- b. 3 f. 2 Harlem Job Committee 1938
- b. 3 f. 3 Harlem Labor Union 1937
- b. 3 f. 4 Discrimination and Justice, Socialism 1937
- b. 3 f. 5 Harlem Labor Center - Activities
- b. 3 f. 6 Harlem Labor Center - Discrimination 1935
- b. 3 f. 7 Claude McKay and Labor 1937
- b. 3 f. 8 Negro Labor Committee - Anniversaries 1937-1945
- b. 3 f. 9 National Negro Congress 1937
- b. 3 f. 10 New York City Housing Authority 1957-1958
- b. 3 f. 11 Negro Labor Committee - Organization of Laundry Workers
- b. 3 f. 12 Negro Labor Committee - Organization of Barbers 1937-1938
- b. 3 f. 13 Negro Labor Committee 1936-1937
- b. 3 f. 14 International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union 1936-1968
- b. 3 f. 15 Negro Labor Assembly 1935-1937
- b. 3 f. 16 News Clippings re Specific Trades 1936-1938
- b. 3 f. 17 Printed Calendars
- b. 3 f. 18 A. Philip Randolph and Roy Lancaster 1925-1928
- b. 3 f. 19 International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union  
Scrapbook 2 - Subject Files

Labor and Politics (cont.)  
Scrapbook 2 - Subject Files (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 20 Negroes - Discrimination, Civil Rights, etc.
- b. 3 f. 21 Various Unions
- b. 3 f. 22 Harlem Barbers 1939
- b. 3 f. 23 May Day
- b. 3 f. 24 Negro Labor Committee 1935-1941
- b. 3 f. 25 Negro Labor Committee 1937-1957
- b. 3 f. 26 Articles and Speeches Written by Crosswaith
- b. 3 f. 27 Essays Written by Crosswaith 1923
- b. 3 f. 28 Poems Written by Crosswaith
  - b. 4 News Clippings - Labor
    - b. 4 f. 1 1922-1929
    - b. 4 f. 2 1930-1937
    - b. 4 f. 3 1935
    - b. 4 f. 4 1935-1936
    - b. 4 f. 5 1937-1938
    - b. 4 f. 6 1939, 1963, n.d
    - b. 4 f. 7 News Clippings - Socialism 1918-1938, 1947
    - b. 4 f. 8 News Clippings - Crosswaith's Political Campaigns 1922-1939
    - b. 4 f. 9 News Clippings - General 1929-1939, 1963
  - b. 5 Writings

*WRITINGS SERIES, 1921-1953 (. 6 lin. ft.)*The writings primarily focus on two major topics: socialism and organized labor as they relate to blacks. All of Crosswaith's writings were in scrapbooks labelled "speeches", with an index to the contents. The original order as they appeared in the scrapbooks may be studied by examining this index. As there did not appear to be any logic to the order of this material, the following arrangement has been imposed: Speeches (chronological), Articles and Essays (chronological; undated material is arranged alphabetically), Press Releases (chronological), Editorials (chronological), Poems, and News Clippings (chronological). Among the subjects he wrote about are: segregation, housing, trade unionism and socialism. As an orator for socialist and labor issues, the collection is rich in Crosswaith's speeches which he delivered nationwide primarily in the 1930's. The series also contains printed announcements, organized chronologically.

Speeches

- b. 5 f. 1 Announcements - Printed Matter 1921-1936
- b. 5 f. 2 Announcements, News Clippings, Correspondence 1931-1934
- b. 5 f. 3 Announcements, News Clippings 1936-1939
- b. 5 f. 4 News Clippings 1928-1934
- b. 5 f. 5 News Clippings 1935-1939
- b. 5 f. 6 Itinerary 1934
- b. 5 f. 7 Letters re Crosswaith's speeches 1933
- b. 5 f. 8 Index to Writings
- b. 5 f. 9 Speeches 1922-1934
- b. 5 f. 10 *The Negro at the Crossroads* 1934
- b. 5 f. 11 Speeches 1935-1941
- b. 5 f. 12 Speeches 1942-1946
- b. 5 f. 13 Speeches 1947-1949, n.d.

Writings (cont.)

Articles and Essays

- b. 5 f. 14 1923-1929
  - b. 5 f. 15 1930-1935
  - b. 5 f. 16 1936-1937
  - b. 5 f. 17 1938-1939
  - b. 5 f. 18 1940-1941
  - b. 5 f. 19 1942-1944
  - b. 5 f. 20 1945-1947, 1953
  - b. 5 f. 21 B - D n.d.
  - b. 5 f. 22 E - Negro n.d.
  - b. 5 f. 23 Negro - O n.d.
  - b. 5 f. 24 P - T n.d.
  - b. 5 f. 25 U - Wand, untitled n.d.
  - b. 6 f. 1 Press Releases 1929, 1937-1944
  - b. 6 f. 2 Editorials 1929-1933, 1941-1947
  - b. 6 f. 3 Poems n.d.
- News Clippings
- b. 6 f. 4 1924-1929
  - b. 6 f. 5 1932-1935
  - b. 6 f. 6 1936-1939, 1963