



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

Guide to the

W. A. Matthew collection

1929-1979

Sc MG 609

Summary

Creator: Matthew, Wentworth A. (Wentworth Arthur), 1892-1973

Title: W. A. Matthew collection

Date: 1929-1979

Size: 0.42 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Gift of Elvin Montgomery, February 1997.

Abstract: The Wentworth A. Matthew collection relates primarily to the financial and real estate concerns of Rabbi Matthew and the Commandment Keepers. Included are deeds, contracts, architectural drawings, and invoices for property purchased in Wyandanch and Babylon, Long Island, where Matthew intended to establish a resident community. Also included are insurance policies for property leased by the congregation in Brooklyn and Manhattan. There are also personal insurance policies for Rabbi Matthew as well as correspondence and wills deeding property to Rabbi Matthew and the synagogue. Of interest are a 1931 letter from Rabbi Arnold J. Ford, musical director of Marcus Garvey's UNIA, to Matthew discussing the latter's certificate of ordination and urging him to encourage Black Jews to settle in Ethiopia. Matthew's death certificate from Harlem Hospital and letters to his daughter are included in the collection.

Preferred citation: [Item], W. A. Matthew collection, Sc MG 609, 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 Diana Lachatanere, March 1997, and Janice Quinter, April 2005.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: artifacts

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Related Materials:

Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation records, Sc MG 574, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Creator History

Chief Rabbi Wentworth A. Matthew was born in the British West Indies, and began his ministerial career in a Black Pentacostal church which had endorsed the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded by Marcus Garvey. The first Black rabbi in New York City, Chief Rabbi Matthew founded the Commandment Keepers of the Living God. He trained and ordained many of the Black rabbis who later founded synagogues in various cities in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

Rabbi Matthew believed that the ancient Hebrews were Black, and that Judaism was as much a part of Black people's culture and religious heritage as Christianity. In bringing Judaism to Blacks, he believed he was reclaiming part of their heritage as opposed to converting them to Judaism. Although Matthew incorporated many customs, songs, and foods of European Jewish origin into the religious practices he taught, he also introduced African, Caribbean, and American traditions to his congregation. His teachings combined Jewish religious traditions with Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism as a method of instilling pride in Black people. For decades he tried without success to find common ground with white Jews by speaking at white synagogues around the country and at B'nai Brith lodges. He was also unsuccessful in his efforts to join the New York Board of Rabbis, but was accepted by the Tifereth Israel Rabbinical Academy of America. As an adjunct to his congregation, he created a masonic lodge called the Royal Order of Aethiopian Hebrews (1919) in Harlem, New York.

Scope and Content Note

The Wentworth A. Matthew collection relates primarily to the financial and real estate concerns of Rabbi Matthew and the Commandment Keepers. Included are deeds, contracts, architectural drawings, and invoices for property purchased in Wyandanch and Babylon, Long Island, where Matthew intended to establish a resident community. Also included are insurance policies for property leased by the congregation in Brooklyn and Manhattan. There are also personal insurance policies for Rabbi Matthew as well as correspondence and wills deeding property to Rabbi Matthew and the synagogue. Of interest are a 1931 letter from Rabbi Arnold J. Ford, musical director of Marcus Garvey's UNIA, to Matthew discussing the latter's certificate of ordination and urging him to encourage Black Jews to settle in Ethiopia. Matthew's death certificate from Harlem Hospital and letters to his daughter are included in the collection.

Key Terms

Occupations

African American clergy

Subjects

African American Jews

African Americans -- Religion

Judaism -- Customs and practices

Names

Ford, Arnold Josiah, 1877-1935

Matthew, Wentworth A. (Wentworth Arthur), 1892-1973

Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation (Harlem, New York, N.Y.)

Royal Order of Aethiopian Hebrews (Harlem, New York, N.Y.)

Container List

Letters

- b. 1 f. 1 1920s
- b. 1 f. 2 1930s
- b. 1 f. 3 1940s
- b. 1 f. 4 1950s
- b. 1 f. 5 1970s
- b. 1 f. 6 Legal
- b. 1 f. 7 Wills
- b. 1 f. 8 Leases
- b. 1 f. 9 Deeds
- b. 1 f. 10 Maps
- b. 1 f. 11 Clippings
- b. 1 f. 12 Miscellaneous

Insurance

- b. 1 f. 13 Life
- b. 1 f. 14 Title
- b. 1 f. 15 Fire
- b. 1 f. 16 Home
- b. 1 f. 17 Invoices