



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

Guide to the

**Muriel Petioni papers**

1935-2008

Sc MG 808

Processed by Candice Carr, December 2014.

## Summary

**Collector:** Petioni, Muriel, 1914-2011

**Title:** Muriel Petioni papers

**Date:** 1935-2008

**Size:** 5.33 linear feet (10 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of Muriel Petioni, September 2008.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** Known as the "Mother of Medicine in Harlem", Muriel Petioni was a doctor and community leader. The Muriel Petioni papers reflect primarily on her participation in various organizations including the Gayap Organization; they also include professional correspondence; African diaspora related documents; and Harlem related documents.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Muriel Petioni papers, Sc MG 808, 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:** Processed by Candice Carr, December 2014.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the General Research and Reference Division: books

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

**Related Materials:**

George Padmore letters, Sc MG 624, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

Muriel Petioni was born in 1914 in Trinidad and Tobago. Her father moved to Harlem in 1918 after his outspoken views about local political and economic conditions in Trinidad damaged his future career opportunities. Petioni's father became a physician, opened a private practice in Harlem, and was the personal physician to Marcus Garvey. In 1919 at the age of 5, Petioni, along with her mother and siblings, moved to Harlem to join her father. Petioni was strongly influenced by her father's commitment to medicine, community, and political activism. After attending public schools in Harlem and eventually graduating from Wadleigh High School, she enrolled in the pre-med program at New York University. Two years later she transferred to Howard University and received her B.A. in 1934 and her M.D. in 1937. As the only female in her graduating class of 1937, Petioni was already starting to blaze trails. Petioni taught at various universities, started a private practice, and held various positions at a number of hospitals. As a leader in the community, Petioni sat on numerous boards, including the Trinidad and Tobago GAYAP Organization, New York Council for Smaller Churches, Friends of Harlem Hospital Center, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, to name a few. Petioni was also affiliated with many other organizations, including the Susan Smith McKinney Steward Medical Society (Founder and President 1974-1984, member thereafter), Medical Women of NMA (now Council of Women's Concerns, Founder and first President), Doctor's Council of the City of New York (Treasurer 1980-1984), Coalition of 100 Black Women, and Inner City Broadcasting Company. The "Mother of Medicine in Harlem" proved to be a pioneering figure in Harlem and in the medical profession, servicing her community until her death in 2011.

## Scope and Content Note

The Muriel Petioni papers reflect primarily on her participation in various organizations, including the Gayap Organization; also included are professional correspondence; African diaspora related documents; and Harlem related documents. There is limited information about Petioni's personal life included in the collection.

**Arrangement:** Arranged into 4 series: I. Personal; II. Professional; III. Organizational files; and IV. Printed matter.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American women  
African American women -- New York (State) -- New York  
African American women physicians  
Caribbean Americans -- New York (State) -- New York  
Trinidad and Tobago -- Social life and customs  
Trinidadians -- United States  
West Indians -- New York (State) -- New York

### Geographic Names

United States -- Emigration and immigration

### Names

Ollivierre, Cyril C., 1903-1975  
Petioni, Muriel, 1914-2011

Trinidad and Tobago Gayap Organization of America

## Container List

### Personal ca. 1940-2008

This series consist of biographical information about her professional life, travel records, personal notes, biographies, resumes, address books, contact lists, personal correspondence, medical practice records, documents related to her property at 456 Manhattan Ave, and papers related to her cousin Micheal Shelton.

- b. 1 f. 1-7 Biographical
- b. 1 f. 8 Personal notes
- b. 1 f. 9-11 Travel records
- b. 1 f. 12 Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 13 Real estate (456 Manhattan Avenue)
- b. 1 f. 14 Checkbook registers, cancelled checks, and address books
- b. 1 f. 15 Loyal Flower Lodge
  - b. 1a Greeting cards
  - b. 1b

### Professional ca. 1960-2003

This series mostly contains professional correspondence to and from Petioni over the course of her career; there are a few records related to her private practice.

- b. 1 f. 16 Medical practice records
- b. 1 f. 17 Office building
  - Contact lists
  - Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 19-22 Rangel, Charles
- b. 1 f. 23-27 General
  - b. 2 f. 1-5

### Organizational files ca. 1950-2003

This series includes files on the various organizations with which Petioni was affiliated or for which she was a board member. Additionally, there are files related to the African diaspora as it related to her, material related to her experience in Harlem, papers related to events and activities in Harlem, and material related to various subject files. The Gayap files documents the organization's work and its relationship with various businesses and organizations in the home island and the United States as well as offers sketches of the contributions and interests of Trinbagonian and other Caribbean individuals and organizations in the United States. Materials of interest are: letters regarding Eric Williams' official 1964 visit to New York; a letter to Cyril Ollivierre from George T. Daniel, member of the United Nations Advisory Council for the Trust Territory in Somaliland, wherein he describes the land and people of Somalia and reflects on the African continent; and Ollivierre's obituary of his close associate, the pan-Africanist George Padmore. Organizations represented in the collection include the Caribbean Leagues of America, Trinidad a Tobago Alliance of the USA and West Indies Student Liaison Office.

Arranged in alphabetical order by organization name or topic.

- b. 2 f. 6-12 African Diaspora related documents
- b. 2 f. 13 American Academy of Family Physicians
- b. 2 f. 14-16 American Cancer Society
- b. 2 f. 17 Association for Sickle Cell Anemia
- b. 2 f. 18 Black physicians
- b. 2 f. 19 Black women doctors
- b. 2 f. 20 Breast Examination Center of Harlem

Organizational files (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 21 Coalition for School Based Primary Care
- b. 2 f. 22-24 Coalition of 100 Black Women
  - b. 3 f. 1
  - b. 3 f. 2 Columbia University School of Social Science
  - b. 3 f. 3 Commission on Youth
  - b. 3 f. 4-5 Doctors Association of the City of New York
  - b. 3 f. 6 Doctors Council
- Gayap
 

The Trinidad and Tobago Gayap Organization of America, Inc., was founded in New York City in 1958 with the aim of "lend[ing] a helping hand to the people of the West Indies in general and ... Trinidad and Tobago in particular." Among other functions, Gayap used funds raised through its events and membership dues to assist West Indian students and contribute to festivals and other activities in the Caribbean. In addition to maintaining and improving relations among West Indians, GAYAP also sought to improve ties between West Indians and Americans. The organization published a newsletter, *Flambeau*, about Trinidad and Tobago and its culture.

  - b. 3a f. 1 History and membership
  - b. 3a f. 2 Membership meetings 1984-1987
  - Committees
    - b. 3a f. 3 Dance Committee 1958-1971
    - b. 3a f. 4 Executive Committee minutes 1959
    - b. 3a f. 5 Fundraising 1984
  - Correspondence
    - b. 3a f. 6 General 1958-1973
    - b. 3a f. 7 Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Eric Williams 1960-1965
    - b. 3a f. 8 General Building and Loan Association, Trinidad 1959
    - b. 3a f. 9 The West Indies Student Liaison Office 1960-1962
  - Financial
    - b. 3a f. 10 General 1965-1975
    - b. 3a f. 11 Insurance contracts for event 1958
    - b. 3a f. 12 Checkbook 1962-1965
  - The Flambeau Newsletter*
    - b. 3a f. 13 Correspondence 1959-1972
    - b. 3a f. 14 The Hunt Printing Company
    - b. 3a f. 15 General 1960-1975
    - b. 3a f. 16 Financial
    - b. 3a f. 17 Articles
  - Organizations and subject files
    - b. 3a f. 18 Caribbean League of America, Inc 1957
    - b. 3a f. 19 Colonial Life Insurance Company 1957-1959
    - b. 3a f. 20 Printed matter
    - b. 3a f. 21 New York World's Fair, Trinidad and Tobago Day
    - b. 3a f. 22 St. Andrews (Episcopal) Church, Harlem 1964-1965
    - b. 3a f. 23 Stevenson, Herbert 1964-1972
    - b. 3a f. 24 Trinidad and Tobago Alliance of the U.S.A. provisional constitution 1975

Organizational files (cont.)

Gayap (cont.)

Organizations and subject files (cont.)

- b. 3a f. 25 Murray, George J. A., Sr., Trinidad and Tobago Alliance of the U.S.A 1973
- b. 3a f. 26 Trinidad and Tobago news
- b. 3a f. 27 Trinidad and Tobago United Cultural Association, Inc 1973
- b. 3a f. 28 Trinidad and Tobago United Organization constitution 1967
- b. 3a f. 29 West Indies Foundation 1958-1959
- Olliviere, Cyril correspondence
- b. 3a f. 30 1943-1966
- b. 3a f. 31 Manley, N. W 1956
- b. 3a f. 32 Alpha Lodge #116, F. and A.M. of New Jersey 1962
- b. 3a f. 33 *James, C. L. R. The Nation paper* 1959
- b. 3a f. 34 Padmore, George undated
- Harlem
- b. 3 f. 7-8 Friends of Harlem Hospital
- b. 3 f. 9 Greater Harlem Nursing Home Company Inc
- b. 3 f. 10-12 Harlem general
- b. 3 f. 13 Harlem Congregation for Community Improvement
- b. 3 f. 14 Harlem Counsel of Elders
- b. 3 f. 15 Harlem Health Promotional Center
- b. 3 f. 16 Harlem Heart Advisory Board
- b. 3 f. 17-26 Harlem Hospital
- b. 4 f. 1-2
- b. 4 f. 3 Harlem School of Nursing
- b. 4 f. 4-8 Harlem Urban Development Corporation
- b. 4 f. 9-12 Howard University
- b. 4 f. 13 Inner City Broadcasting Corp
- b. 4 f. 14 Medical Service for Women PC
- b. 4 f. 15-16 Miscellaneous invitations and programs
- b. 4 f. 17 Morningside Heights Housing Corporation
- b. 4 f. 18 Morrisania Youth and Community
- b. 4 f. 19-23 National Medical Association
- b. 5 f. 1-9 Includes the Empire State Medical Association, Empire State Political Action Committee, Manhattan Central Medical Society, New York County Medical Society, and information on women in medicine.
- b. 5 f. 10 National Security Seminar
- b. 5 f. 11 National Steering Committee for Minority Health
- b. 5 f. 12-14 New York College of Podiatric Medicine and Foot Clinics of New York
- b. 5 f. 15-22 New York Council of Smaller Churches
- b. 6 f. 1-9
- b. 6 f. 10-14 New York County Medical Society
- b. 6 f. 15 Pediatrics
- b. 6 f. 16 Reference articles from Petioni's first semester of medical school
- b. 6 f. 17-18 Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education
- b. 6 f. 19 State of New York Department of Health

Organizational files (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 20 State of New York Governor's Advisory Committee for Black Affairs
- b. 6 f. 21 Stoddard Baptist Nursing Home
- b. 6 f. 22-28 Susan Smith McKinney Steward Medical Society
- b. 7 f. 1-4
- b. 7 f. 5 The Caribbean Women's Health Association
- b. 7 f. 6 The Young Woman's Christian Association of the City of New York
- b. 7 f. 7 Trinidad and Tobago Alliance
- b. 7 f. 8 Trinidad Co-Operative Bank LTD
- b. 7 f. 9 United Nations
- b. 7 f. 10-11 Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone
- b. 7 f. 12 Women's health
- b. 7 f. 13-27 Printed matter ca. 1950-2000

This series contains publications and newspaper articles, including some featuring Petioni.