

# Guide to the Leviticus Lyon PapersJWJ MSS 173

## JWJ MSS 173



by Afua Ferdnance

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P. O. Box 208330  
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(203) 432-2977  
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<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** JWJ MSS 173

**CREATOR:** Lyon, Leviticus, 1894-1958

**TITLE:** Leviticus Lyon Papers

**DATES:** 1905-1948

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2.29 linear feet (6 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** In English.

In English.

**SUMMARY:** The Leviticus Lyon papers document the professional and personal activities of the tenor singer, music conductor and choral director. Letters, writings, illustrations and photographs are included in this collection. Correspondence details the life of Leviticus Lyon from childhood to adulthood with personal letters from parents, siblings, and friends including the originally titled "world's fastest human," African American Olympic track star Howard P. Drew. Other correspondence includes letters from blues legend W.C. Handy and prominent Harlem lawyer Hubert T. Delany. The Professional Papers series illustrates Lyon's efforts in establishing the Negro Symphony Orchestra, his participation in the Annual Harlem Music Week, and his work as choral director in the Westchester Negro Choral Union. Personal papers include poems, illustrations, and other writings by Lyon.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.lyon1>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.lyon1>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box  
f. folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Source unknown.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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### Conditions Governing Use

The Leviticus Lyon Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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### Preferred Citation

Leviticus Lyon Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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### Processing Information

Former call number: JWJ MSS Lyon.

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### Related Materials

Other photographs of Leviticus Lyon can be found in Photographs of Prominent African Americans (JWJ MSS 76).

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## Biographical / Historical

Leviticus Lyon was born on May 29, 1894 in San Francisco, California and spent most of his childhood in Oakland, California. He was born to Elizabeth Garland Lyon and Giraldo Gomez Lyon. Lyon's mother was born in the West Indies (Saint Kitts and Nevis) while his father was born in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa. His father was likely a steward, as his employment in the United States 1900 census is listed as "Stewart" and he frequently discussed life on ships in letters to his son. According to Giraldo Gomez Lyon's personal writings, he immigrated to the United States in 1880 from West Africa and married Elizabeth Garland in 1888. As a teenager, Leviticus Lyon held many jobs including elevator operator at the United States Customs Service in San Francisco, California. Lyon demonstrated his singing talent to officials in the customs department who in turn used their influence to transfer Lyon to work at the New York Customs office in 1919 to assist him in pursuing his musical education. He eventually received a fellowship to study at the Julliard School in 1925. In the course of his career, Lyon became a prominent tenor and choral director, giving performances at Carnegie Hall and St. Marks Methodist Church in Harlem, New York City. Lyon also took leadership positions in New York's music scene, assisting in the formation of the Negro Symphony Orchestra and chairing the Westchester Negro Choral Union. He lived chiefly in New York City until his death in 1958.

## **Scope and Contents**

The Leviticus Lyon papers document the professional and personal activities of the tenor singer, music conductor and choral director. Letters, writings, illustrations and photographs are included in this collection. Correspondence details the life of Leviticus Lyon from childhood to adulthood with personal letters from parents, siblings, and friends including the originally titled "world's fastest human," African American Olympic track star Howard P. Drew. Other correspondence includes letters from blues legend W.C. Handy and prominent Harlem lawyer Hubert T. Delany. The Professional Papers series illustrates Lyon's efforts in establishing the Negro Symphony Orchestra, his participation in the Annual Harlem Music Week, and his work as choral director in the Westchester Negro Choral Union. Personal papers include poems, illustrations, and other writings by Lyon.

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## **Arrangement**

Organized into three series: I. Correspondence, 1906-1946. II. Professional Papers, 1918-1948. III. Personal Papers, 1905-1948.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1906–1946

This series contains both personal and professional correspondence of Leviticus Lyon. Correspondence in this series illustrates Leviticus Lyon's childhood in Oakland and San Francisco, California along with his rise into adulthood and professional career.

The series is arranged alphabetically by last name.

b. 1, f. 1	"A" general	1914–1940
b. 1, f. 2	Anquetil, Raymond	1920
b. 1, f. 3	"B" general	1914–1943
b. 1, f. 4	"C" general	1914–1945
b. 1, f. 5	Caulkins, Dana	1938–1944
b. 1, f. 6	Cavallini, Ed.	1917
b. 1, f. 7	Chorlton, E.A.	1919–1921
b. 1, f. 8	Cohen, Benjamin	1930–1941
b. 1, f. 9	Davis, Eugene	Circa 1930-1940
b. 1, f. 10	"D" general	1917–1938
b. 1, f. 11	Drew, Howard P.	1914
b. 1, f. 12	"E" general	1918–1938
b. 1, f. 13	"F" general	1914–1941
b. 1, f. 14	Forsyth, L.C.	1920–1928
b. 1, f. 15	"G" general	1928–1938
b. 1, f. 16	Garland, Patricia	1919–1921
b. 1, f. 17	Gottsleben, Emil Photographs of Lucretia Forsyth (Leviticus Lyon's aunt), the grave of Lucretia Forsyth, and a photograph of Emil Gottsleben (friend of Lucretia Forsyth), are included in this folder.	1932–1934
b. 1, f. 18	Green, Robert	1930–1934
b. 1, f. 19	"H" general	1932
b. 1, f. 20	Handy, W.C. (William Christopher)	1932–1938
b. 1, f. 21	Hernandez, Theodore	1938
b. 1, f. 22	Holloway, Augustus	1943–1946
b. 1, f. 23	"I" general	1918–1939

b. 2, f. 24	"L" general	1920-1939
b. 2, f. 25	Levy, Ferdinand	1933-1941
b. 2, f. 26	Lyon, Elizabeth G.	1920-1921
b. 2, f. 27	Lyon, Giraldo G.	1906-1907
b. 2, f. 28	Lyon, Giraldo G.	1908-1915
b. 2, f. 29	"M" general	1914-1945
b. 2, f. 30	"N" general	1943
b. 2, f. 31	National Broadcasting Company	1933-1934
b. 2, f. 32	Overton, W.S.	1916
b. 2, f. 33	"P" general	1939
b. 2, f. 34	Pitts, Terry	1938-1939
b. 2, f. 35	"R" general	1914-1943
b. 2, f. 36	"S" general	1938-1945
b. 2, f. 37	"T" general	1920-1940
b. 2, f. 38	Thomas Music Studio	1935
b. 2, f. 39	Tomlinson, Beatrice W.	1919
b. 2, f. 40	Villard, Oswald G.	1918-1919
b. 2, f. 41	"W" general	1913-1941
b. 2, f. 42-43	Unidentified	1920-1936

## Series II: Professional Papers, 1918–1948

The professional papers series documents Leviticus Lyon's efforts in establishing the Negro Symphony Orchestra, his work as choral director in the Westchester Negro Choral Union, and his career as a tenor singer. The series includes memorandums and notes from various organizations such as the Musical Art Group, as well as ephemera including programs from Lyon's singing career.

Folders are arranged alphabetically with materials within the files arranged chronologically.

b. 3, f. 44	Aggrey Memorial School	1938
b. 3, f. 45	Annual Harlem Music Week	1932–1939
b. 3, f. 46	Certificates, resumes and work related materials	1922–1945
b. 3, f. 47	Dett Musical Club	circa 1920-1946
b. 3, f. 48	Federal Music Project	1937
b. 3, f. 49	Musical Art Group	1936–1937
b. 3, f. 50-53	Negro Symphony Orchestra	1937–1940
b. 6, f. 80	Negro Symphony Orchestra (oversize)	1939
b. 3, f. 54	New York Public Library controversy	1938–1939
b. 3, f. 55	Programs	1918–1943
b. 4, f. 56-60	Westchester Negro Choral Union	1937–1940
b. 4, f. 61-62	YMCA	1933–1948



**Series III: Personal Papers, 1905–1942**

Personal papers include various writings, illustrations and notes by Leviticus Lyon.

Folders are arranged alphabetically while materials within the folders are arranged chronologically.

b. 4, f. 63	Addresses and envelopes	Circa 1905-1948
b. 4, f. 64	Birthday card	Circa 1905-1948
b. 4, f. 65	Clippings	1939
b. 4, f. 66	Diary	1916
b. 4, f. 67	Financial documents	1929–1942
b. 4, f. 68	Government documents	1917–1920
b. 4, f. 69	Notes	Circa 1905-1948
b. 4, f. 70	Registration and selection for military service	1917
b. 4, f. 71	School records	1905–1939
b. 5, f. 72-78	Writings	1912–1942
b. 5, f. 79	Writings of others	Circa 1923
b. 6, f. 81	Writings of others; Sherman Morse clipping (oversize)	Circa 1905-1946

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

African American conductors (Music) -- New York (State)  
Choirs (Music) -- New York (State)  
Conductors (Music) -- New York (State)  
Tenors (Singers) -- New York (State)

### **Genres / Formats**

Drawings (visual works)  
Photographs

### **Occupations**

Conductors (Music) -- New York (State) -- 20th Century

### **Names**

Delany, Hubert T., 1901-1990  
Drew, Howard P.  
Handy, W. C. (William Christopher), 1873-1958  
Lyon, Leviticus, 1894-1958

### **Corporate Bodies**

Annual Harlem Music Week  
Negro Symphony Orchestra  
Westchester Negro Choral Union