

A Guide to the John Malcus Ellison Papers 1941-1979

John Malcus Ellison Papers 1941-1979
1941-1979

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MS-0001

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Creator

John Malcus Ellison Papers

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There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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John Malcus Ellison Papers, MS-0001 , Archives and Special Collections Department, L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University

Biographical/Historical Information

Born 02 February 1889 in Northumberland County, Virginia, John Malcus Ellison was one of twin sons. His early life was very humble allowing for very little intellectual stimulation beyond learning to read in the racially segregated schools of his rural community. As he explained in a short autobiographical sketch he wrote to James H. Croushore of Fredricksburg, Virginia in the late 1950's, At the age of 14 I was hired out for 7.00 dollars per month as a farm hand. My varied experiences caused me much unrest and anxiety as I longed for a fuller and more meaningful life Opportunities for education were very meager in my home community, and so at the age of 17 I went to Normal Industrial Institute now Virginia State College at Petersburg, Va. After two and one half years of study I transferred to Virginia Union University in 1909 and completed my High School and College work. At that time, Wayland Academy was the division of Union that provided secondary education to students. In 1917, Ellison earned his A.B. in Education at Virginia Union. He returned to his home in the Northern Neck of Virginia as pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church and principal of the Northern Neck Industrial Academy. He later founded and headed the Northumberland County High School.

In 1927 Ellison earned a Master of Arts in Religious Education and Philosophy of Religion from Oberlin College and subsequently taught at what is now Virginia State University in sociology and ethics. There he was appointed the first college minister . He did graduate work at Columbia University from 1930 to 1931 and at Union Theological Seminary in New York City from 1931 to 1932. By 1933, Ellison had earned his Ph.D. in Christian Education and Sociology from Drew University, been pastor of the Zion Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., taught Religious Education at Howard University's School of Religion, and authored several publications on rural, Negro life in Virginia. It was in that same year that he married Elizabeth Balfour, a music educator and performer from Brooklyn, New York.

Dr. Ellison assumed the presidency of Virginia Union at a very difficult time in history. The country had just entered World War II and the era of Jim Crow was at its peak in the South. Being the first African American to assume the leadership of Virginia Union, he lived with the burden of proving himself capable and worthy of the title President. It is generally believed that he succeeded at the task. In spite of the manpower drain on both the student body and the male faculty, Union survived the worst of times through 1946 when the GIs returned to school and prosperity and stability came back to the university. Ellison took an active part in the support of US troops, especially Virginia Union students in the service, and in the civilian efforts that maintained the community at home. It was also during his administration that the Belgian Friendship Building project was undertaken and successfully accomplished.

After the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, the Belgian government could not dismantle and return their elaborate exhibit and its housing to Nazi-occupied Belgium. Several options were explored to dispose of the splendid structure originally designed to be a stand-alone college in Belgium. Benefactors of Negro education, however, won the bid. The Belgian Friendship Building with its ornate friezes depicting black life in

the Belgian Congo would be relocated to the campus of Virginia Union University. Negotiations for the transfer of title and property were begun in the previous administration of William J. Clark; fund raising, re-design and physical relocation were left to Ellison's stewardship. By 1949 the campus had been renovated, the Belgian building moved and fitted for the library, science laboratories and the gymnasium and a debt of nearly one-half million dollars had been retired under Ellison's leadership. This project was a major concern during the first half of his career and his papers reflect its importance.

Other improvements on the campus followed the Belgian Building project including re-organization of the university's administrative structure, significant increase in the endowment, and additions to the physical plant (e.g., Hovey Stadium, new dormitories and other facilities).

Concurrent with his academic and administrative career, Ellison kept an active ministerial career, preaching and teaching throughout Virginia on a regular basis and appearing as guest pastor at various churches, Sunday Schools and conferences all over the country. Summers were often spent teaching aspiring ministers in special programs that he helped design. He edited religious journals and newsletters as well as publications for the Scottish Rite and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Ellison was a prolific author as well; he published several books, tracts and brochures most of which were copies of his favorite and most popular sermons.

As a prominent African American educator, Ellison was active in many organizations advancing the cause of both civil rights and higher education for his race. His involvement with national organizations such as the National Youth Administration, Southern Education Foundation, Negro Organization Society, National Conference of Church-Related Colleges, the NAACP and many others was typical of African American leaders of that time as they cooperated to support the existence and survival of their schools and institutions.

After his term as president, Ellison continued on at Virginia Union as chancellor and professor until his death on 13 October 1979. He is buried at Riverview Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia.

Scope and Content Information

This collection contains the administrative and personal records of John Malcus Ellison as president of Virginia Union University (1941-1955), chancellor (1955-79), minister, teacher, author and editor. The bulk of the collection is from the early years of his presidency, 1941-1945, with very few materials from the later years or during his tenure as chancellor. Although most of the collection is correspondence conducted in his official capacity as president, because these materials were received from his family, the Ellison Papers are organized as a manuscript collection.

The correspondence files give an intriguing picture of Ellison in his role as president of a small, African American university in a segregated southern city. The many letters from parents, guardians and prospective students reflect his function as father and disciplinarian to the campus. The letters to and from prominent Richmond figures and leaders of the area schools, both black and white, reveal the part he played in community relations. Of special interest is the correspondence with other African American educational leaders, such as Benjamin Mays, which shows the support these educators lent one another in their struggles for their institutions to not only survive, but succeed.

The subject files disclose what organizations Ellison participated in as president. Like many of his contemporaries, he was active in national organizations as they provided a support network for African American higher education. These files also reveal what was happening on campus during the early years of his administration, including the Belgian Building files which offer a fascinating unfolding of the construction of the building.

The personal files are related mainly to his role as preacher and teacher. As with the other series, the lines are often blurred in these files between Ellison's many roles. His speeches and sermons are an interesting compliment to his writings, and often there is overlap between the two as he published collections of sermons. Included in the writings are his extensive notes in preparation for a definitive history of Virginia Union, for which many of the photographs in these materials were collected. The programs show not only which events and activities Ellison participated in, both on campus and off, but those which he attended or supported.

Due to severe mold damage and insect infestation, many records have been preservation photocopied.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged by series and chronological therein.

Contents List

Series 1. Correspondence 1941-1978

Extent 2500 items

Scope and Content

The correspondence spans Ellison's Virginia Union career from 1941 almost until his death in 1979. It is primarily routine correspondence between Ellison and financial contributors, student and job applicants, foundation officers, organizational representatives, alumni and parents. Much of Ellison's correspondence was directed to donors, large and small, especially while fundraising for the Belgian Building.

Personnel issues, as well as student discipline, are included throughout all of the correspondence. The advent of exchange student enrollment from Africa and the Caribbean is reflected as well. Dr. and Mrs. Ellison were described as having this mission: bringing foreign students to Virginia Union for their post-secondary education. There are social notes as well as letters of introduction, reference and inquiry from and about several such students.

Several letters of interest from prospective teachers provide profiles of aspiring African American professionals during the Jim Crow era. Missives from parents and guardians about their young people away at school for the first time reflect the more comprehensive, paternal role of the African American college administrator of the time. Threads of dialogue between Ellison and concerned fathers can be traced in the correspondence concerning the progress of Simeon Booker, Jr., Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and William H. Gray, Jr. as examples.

Newly appointed presidents and principals of black institutions were his contemporaries; as a network of leaders, they corresponded frequently both professionally and personally about issues facing African Americans at that time. The success or failure of the schools originally founded to educate and uplift the emancipated slaves depended upon their leadership and tenacity. Both male and female administrators were active in this support network as evidenced by correspondence from Nannie Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown along with Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Johnson, F. D. Bluford, and Miles W. Connor, all prominent leaders of black educational institutions. Other notable personages among the correspondents are Rev. Vernon Johns, Carter G. Woodson, and Judge William H. Hastie.

Arrangement

chronological

January-June 1941

Box-folder 1.1

July 1941

Box-folder 1.2

August 1941

Box-folder 1.3

September 1941

Box-folder 1.4

October 1941

Box-folder 1.5

November 1941

Box-folder 1.6

December 1941

Box-folder 1.7

January 1942

Box-folder 1.8

February 1942

Box-folder 1.9

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March 1942

Box-folder 1.10

April 1942

Box-folder 1.11

May 1942

Box-folder 1.12

June 1942

Box-folder 1.13

July 1942

Box-folder 1.14

August 1942

Box-folder 1.15

September 1942

Box-folder 1.16

October 1942

Box-folder 1.17

November 1942

Box-folder 1.18

December 1942

Box-folder 1.19

January 1943

Box-folder 1.20

February 1943

Box-folder 1.21

March 1943

Box-folder 1.22

April 1943

Box-folder 1.23

May 1943

Box-folder 1.24

June 1943

Box-folder 2.25

July 1943

Box-folder 2.26

August 1943

Box-folder 2.27

September 1943

Box-folder 2.28

October 1943

Box-folder 2.29

November 1943

Box-folder 2.30

December 1943

Box-folder 2.31

January 1944

Box-folder 2.32

February 1944

Box-folder 2.33

March 1944

Box-folder 2.34

April 1944

Box-folder 2.35

May 1944

Box-folder 2.36

June 1944

Box-folder 2.37

July 1944

Box-folder 2.38

August 1944

Box-folder 2.39

September 1944

Box-folder 2.40

October 1944

Box-folder 2.41

November 1944

Box-folder 2.42

December 1944

Box-folder 2.43

January 1945

Box-folder 2.44

February-March 1945

Box-folder 2.45

April-May 1945

Box-folder 2.46

June-July 1945

Box-folder 2.47

August-December 1945

Box-folder 2.48

Correspondence 1946

Box-folder 3.49

Correspondence 1947

Box-folder 3.50

Correspondence 1948-1949

Box-folder 3.51

Correspondence 1950-1951

Box-folder 3.52

January-August 1952

Box-folder 3.53

September-October 1952

Box-folder 3.54

November-December 1952

Box-folder 3.55

January-February 1953

Box-folder 3.56

March-April 1953

Box-folder 3.57

May 1953

Box-folder 3.58

June 1953

Box-folder 3.59

July 1953

Box-folder 3.60

August-September 1953

Box-folder 3.61

Correspondence 1954-1955

Box-folder 3.62

Correspondence 1956-1959

Box-folder 3.63

Correspondence 1961-1978

Box-folder 3.64

Series 2. Special Correspondence 1941-1947

Extent 500 items

Scope and Content

Ellison kept separate files for certain individuals who were primarily fundraisers first pressed into service for the Belgian Building project. Some worked among African American friends and churches and others were institutional representatives who handled larger sums of money. In the case of Marie Hancock (Mrs. Gordon), she was apparently an employed fund developer for the university, while Miles Connor and C. L. Franklin were active alumni chapter presidents. Because of the distinction of being the first African American president of Virginia Union, Ellison received many pieces of congratulatory correspondence ranging from commercial greeting cards to letters and telegrams. The latter were preservation photocopied.

Arrangement

chronological

Congratulatory Letters

Box-folder 3.65

Connor, Miles W.

Box-folder 3.66

Foster, Luther H.

Box-folder 3.67

Franklin, C. L.

Box-folder 3.68

Hancock, Marie

Box-folder 3.69

Norris, Morgan E.

Box-folder 3.70

Porter, Henry A.

Box-folder 3.71

Powell, Adam Clayton, Sr.

Box-folder 3.72

Series 3. Subject Files 1939-1970

Extent 2000 items

Scope and Content

Ellison's role as college administrator meant that he was involved in every facet of campus business, as well as with many civic, state and national organizations. These subject files demonstrate the multiple hats Ellison wore as president of Virginia Union. Materials such as those in the administrative, Athletics Department and Library files reveal that he was active in the day-to-day business of the campus departments. It was this same intimate involvement that made him so active in personnel and student affairs as exemplified in the application and recommendation letters. (Job applicants often included photographs with their resumes. These snapshots have been removed and housed in PMS-001.)

A definite portrait of the times in which Ellison was working can also be found in the subject files. In files regarding wartime matters, there is material about life during World War II and the Negro's role and expectations during and after it. The many organizations dealing with race relations belie the tense days as institutionalized segregation was coming to an end. The files for educational organizations show the support available at that time to the president of a small African American university.

Arrangement

alphabetical then chronological

Administrative 1940-1944

Box-folder 4.73

Administrative 1945-1949

Box-folder 4.74

Administrative 1950-1979

Box-folder 4.75

Africa Committee

Box-folder 4.76

Alumni Association (VUU)

Box-folder 4.77

American Council on Education

Box-folder 4.78

American Teachers Association

Box-folder 4.79

Application Letters 1941-1943

Box-folder 4.80

Application Letters 1944-1945

Box-folder 4.81

Photographs (removed to PMS-0001)

Box-folder 4.82

Association of American Colleges

Box-folder 4.83

Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes

Box-folder 4.84

Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association

Box-folder 4.85

Correspondence 1939-1941

Box-folder 4.86

Correspondence 1942

Box-folder 4.87

Correspondence 1943-1947

Box-folder 4.88

Financial Records

Box-folder 4.89

National Collegiate Athletic Association

Box-folder 4.90

Programs

Box-folder 4.91

Public Relations

Box-folder 4.92

Baptist Board of Education

Box-folder 4.93

Barco, John W.

Box-folder 4.94

Belgian Building

Box-folder 4.95

Hening, S.E.

Box-folder 4.96

Publications

Box-folder 4.97

Van Kuyck, Hugo

Box-folder 4.98

Budget

Box-folder 4.99

Commencement 1941-1942

Box-folder 4.100

Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Inc.

Box-folder 4.101

Faculty Committee Reports

Box-folder 5.102

Faculty Meeting Minutes

Box-folder 5.103

Fetter, Newton C.

Box-folder 5.104

Founder's Day Letters

Box-folder 5.105

Hampton Institute

Box-folder 5.106

Haynes, George E.

Box-folder 5.107

Administrative

Box-folder 5.108

Calendars and Schedules

Box-folder 5.109

Correspondence

Box-folder 5.110

Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Box-folder 5.111

Julius Rosenwald Fund

Box-folder 5.112

Lee, J. Oscar

Box-folder 5.113

Annual Reports and Miscellaneous

Box-folder 5.114

Correspondence 1941-1942

Box-folder 5.115

Correspondence 1943-1950

Box-folder 5.116

Miscellaneous

Box-folder 5.117

National Association of Collegiate Deans and Registrars in Negro Schools

Box-folder 5.118

National Conference of Church-Related Colleges

Box-folder 5.119

National Education Association

Box-folder 5.120

National Student Health Association

Box-folder 1.21

National Urban League

Box-folder 5.122

National Youth Administration

Box-folder 5.123

Negro Organization Society

Box-folder 5.124

Public Relations

Box-folder 5.125

Rationing Board

Box-folder 5.126

Recommendations 1941-1942

Box-folder 5.127

Recommendations 1943-1945

Box-folder 5.128

Richmond Community Council

Box-folder 5.129

Scholarships

Box-folder 5.130

Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools

Box-folder 5.131

Southern Conference on Race Relations

Box-folder 5.132

Southern Education Foundation 1941-1947

Box-folder 5.133

Southern Education Foundation 1948-1961

Box-folder 5.133

State Board of Education

Box-folder 5.135

Student Government Association

Box-folder 5.136

U.S. Office of Education

Box-folder 5.137

Veterans Administration

Box-folder 5.138

Virginia Conference on Race Relations

Box-folder 5.139

Virginia Council of Churches, Department of Interracial Cooperation

Box-folder 5.140

Virginia State Teachers Association

Box-folder 5.141

World War II Materials

Box-folder 5.142

YMCA

Box-folder 5.143

Series 4. Personal Files 1941-1978

Extent About 1200 items

Scope and Content

Ellison led active life off campus as well. He kept an active preaching schedule both locally and across the

country. (Frequently, when visiting a distant city on Union business, Reverend and Mrs. Ellison would appear as guest preacher and soloist to help offset the expenses of travel.) He was president of the Richmond Ministers Association and the National Program for the Training of Negro Ministers. He was also a member of Alpha Phi Alpha and the Masons (United Supreme Council).

His speeches and sermons grouped here are typed, often untitled essays which seem to be written as orations. There may be some overlap with his writings, especially since most of his publications were originally conceived and presented as sermons.

Ellison was editor of the Baptist Herald (Richmond, Va) and the Scottish Rite Informer (Southern Jurisdiction), and many of his articles and editorials are in the collection. Articles submitted to the periodicals under his supervision are also included, but not always identified with their authors.

Arrangement

alphabetical then chronological

Baptist Herald

Box-folder 6.144

Baptist Training Union Lessons

Box-folder 6.145

Biographies (VUU)

Box-folder 6.146

Clippings

Box-folder 6.147

Connor, Miles W. (Clippings)

Box-folder 6.148

Correspondence and Miscellaneous

Box-folder 6.149

Inaugural Addresses and Eulogies

Box-folder 6.150

Ministerial Materials

Box-folder 6.151

Practice Preaching

Box-folder 6.152

Richmond Ministers Association

Box-folder 6.153

Scottish Rite

Box-folder 6.154

Social Christianity (Seminary Notes at Alderson-Broadus)

Box-folder 6.155

Speeches and Sermons

Box-folder 6.156

Speeches and Sermons

Box-folder 6.157

Speeches and Sermons

Box-folder 6.158

Teaching Materials

Box-folder 6..159

Syllabi and Course Outlines

Box-folder 6.160

Syllabus- Literature in the Ministry of Preaching

Box-folder 6.161

Series 5. Writings 1945-1978

Extent About 2000 items

Scope and Content

Ellison wrote several books and religious pamphlets based on his sermons. He also in the years after his presidency, was working on a history of Virginia Union. His drafts and research notes are included here. Most of his books, including his reports written as a sociologist, are available in the library's rare books collection

Arrangement

alphabetical

Subseries 5.1. General Writings

Extent 1000 items

Scope and Content

The smaller books and tracts are filed here, some with the original manuscript. The miscellaneous files are partial writings or those that were not published. The correspondence is between Ellison and his publishers regarding his writings.

Arrangement

alphabetical

Correspondence

Box-folder 6.162

The Abiding Influence of a Faithful Minister

Box-folder 6.163

Achieving Character Through Christian Education

Box-folder 6.164

The Christian Minister and His Preparation

Box-folder 6.165

The Church Associations-Their Program and Task

Box-folder 6.166

The Church of Our Times and Her Inescapable Challenges

Box-folder 6.167

The Church's Program in Times of War

Box-folder 6.168

Finding Life's Adequate Mastery

Box-folder 6.169

His Disciple Came Unto Him

Box-folder 6.170

How God Made His Prophets

Box-folder 6.171

Let This Mind Be In You

Box-folder 6.172

Life's Adventures

Box-folder 6.173

The Minister: His Educational Leadership and Message

Box-folder 6.174

The More Excellent Way

Box-folder 6.175

The Personal Quality in Preaching and the Preacher's Message from the Psalms

Box-folder 6.176

Prayers and Meditation Expressions

Box-folder 6.177

The Preacher: His Preparation and Message

Box-folder 6.178

Preparing to Preach in the Space Age and The Master's Method: The Preacher's Supreme Example

Box-folder 6.180

Tension and Destiny

Box-folder 6.181

They Who Preach

Box-folder 6.182

A Trilogy on Adventurous Living

Box-folder 6.183

The Voice of Music in Human Experience and the Great Organ

Box-folder 6.184

Miscellaneous

Box-folder 7.185

Miscellaneous

Box-folder 7.186

Subseries 5.2. History of Virginia Union University

Extent 1000 items

Scope and Content

One of Ellison's retirement goals was to write a definitive history of Virginia Union University and he amassed a wealth of research information in preparation. He began by subdividing his work into decades

of history and collecting clippings, photographs, programs, personal histories that he recorded and books written at the turn of the century about African American progress after slavery. Several articles were among his book notes as well as hand-written notes. There is a separate folder of distinguished alumni news. The chapters he used as file labels do not signify actual chapters, but notes and research material related to proposed chapters. Included in chapter one is a typed manuscript of what appears to be chapters one and two.

Arrangement

chronological

Chapter One

Box-folder 7.187

Chapter Two-VUU Comes Into Existence

Box-folder 7.188

Chapter Three-The Period of Transition and Expansion

Box-folder 7.189

Chapter Five-School of Religion News

Box-folder 7.190

Chapter Seven-Institutional Budget

Box-folder 7.191

Chapter Eight-Decade of the 1940's

Box-folder 7.192

Chapter Nine-The Decade 1950-1960

Box-folder 7.193

Chapter 10-The Decade 1960-1970

Box-folder 7.194

Chapter 12-Biographical Sketches

Box-folder 7.195

Chapter 12-Photographs

Box-folder 7.196

Physical Location Removed to PMS-001

Chapter 13-Dr. A. B. James

Box-folder 7.197

Chapters 16-19 Inauguration

Box-folder 7.198

Chapter 20 Appendix

Box-folder 7.199

Drafts and Outlines

Box-folder 7.200

Notes

Box-folder 7.201

Research Materials

Box-folder 7.202

Series 6. Pictures 1912-1973

Extent About 20 items

Scope and Content

In preparation for his history of Virginia Union, Ellison collected and duplicated old photos of the Virginia Union and Hartshorn Memorial College faculty and students. The images range from an early Union Football team to faculty events of the 1960's. All but two of the photographs are black and white, and not all of the subjects are identified.

Photograph of Southern Education Foundation members and directors at the Annual Meeting in New York April 11, 1963

Sleeve PMS-001/1 (Folio)

Color photograph portrait of Ellison 1970

Sleeve PMS-001/2 (Folio)

VUU 1912-1920's

Sleeve PMS-001/3 (Folio)

VUU 1917-1973

Sleeve PMS-001/4 (Folio)

Series 7. Programs 1936-1979

Extent About 200 items

Scope and Content

With the active personal and professional life that Ellison led, he participated in and attended many programs during his lifetime. He was frequently a guest speaker at local churches in the Richmond area and especially Northumberland County's Shiloh Baptist Church. The vast array of programs are sorted in chronological order by whether Ellison appeared on the program or not.

Arrangement

chronological

With Ellison

Box-folder 7.203

Without Ellison

Box-folder 7.204

Series 8. Awards and Certificates 1950-1979

Extent About 25 items

Scope and Content

There were many awards and recognition memorabilia presented to Ellison, especially as his career wound to a close. The plaques were given by a wide range of admirers, from Union-affiliated groups to churches to national organizations. Ellison received honorary degrees from Virginia Union University (06 June 1950), Morehouse College (07 June 1955) and Virginia State College (30 May 1960).

Arrangement

chronological

Certificates 1950-1979

Box-folder 7.205

Honorary Degrees

Box-folder 7.206

Plaques 1955

Box-folder 7.207

Plaques 1977-1979

Box-folder 7.208

Southern Education Foundation plaque 1970

Box-folder 8.209

Afro-American Award plaque 1953

Box-folder 8.210

St. Stephens Baptist Church plaque

Box-folder 8.211

Miles W. Connor Chapter (Vuu Alumni Assn.) May 5, 1979

Box-folder 8.212

Extent Trophy

Oversize certificates and plaques

Box-folder 8.213

Extent

oversized (4 certificates and 2
plaques)

Physical Location removed to OMS-001