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Charl Ormond Williams and Mabel Williams Hughes collection

Title: Charl Ormond Williams and Mabel Williams Hughes collection
Collection No: MSS.448
Extent: 5 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1911-1994

Abstract: The collection comprises documents, correspondence, photographs, publications and scrapbooks that document the lives of Tennessee educators Charl Ormond Williams and Mabel Williams Hughes.

Processed by: James Montague, 2007; Gerald Chaudron, 2024.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Charl Ormond Williams and Mabel Williams Hughes collection, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: 2024 August
Biographical information

Charl and Mabel Williams were born in Arlington, Tennessee, to Crittenden and Minnie Lawrence Thomas Williams. Among their four siblings were sister Merle and brother Hartwell.

Mabel Claire Williams was born on April 16, 1881, and died on December 15, 1970. She married Louis Wearen Hughes (1883-1945) and they had two sons, Logan (1915-1943) and Lawrence Thomas (1920-2003). Mabel was principal of Germantown High School from 1905 to 1909, when she became superintendent of Shelby County Schools. In 1909, she was one of seven women on the 20-member panel formed to get the West Tennessee State Normal School (now the University of Memphis) located in Memphis. Mabel resigned from the superintendent’s position in 1914 after she married but remained active in education. She was the first female president of the Tennessee Public School Officers Association and the first female president of the West Tennessee State Teachers Association. In the mid-1930’s, she was Tennessee state president of the Parent-Teachers Association and Vice President of the National Congress of PTAs. In 1946, she was elected the National President of the PTA.

In 1952, Mabel Hughes was elected to the Tennessee Senate where she served for three consecutive terms, working for the improvement of public education. Her husband had served in the state legislature from 1927 and was serving on the Shelby County Court when he died in 1945. When she retired from the Senate in 1957, her son, Lawrence T. Hughes, was elected to succeed her. It was the first time that a mother, father and son had all been elected to the state legislature.

Charlotte “Charl” Ormond Williams was born on January 24, 1885, and graduated from Arlington’s “high school on the hill” in 1903 and began teaching at Millington later that year. She served as principal of Bartlett Secondary School 1904-1906, then taught at Germantown High School. Within three years, she became Germantown's principal, succeeding her sister, serving until 1912. She worked two years in the Mathematics Department at West Tennessee State Normal School before becoming superintendent of Shelby County Schools, again succeeding her sister, a post she held until 1922. She revolutionized the county school system, increasing its funding, adding new school buildings, and doubling school attendance. During her tenure, Shelby County's schools rose to national prominence. Charl Williams's rapid rise in political patronage-ridden Shelby County indicates that her family enjoyed good relations with E. H. Crump's political machine, at least initially. Williams became the first Tennessee woman to serve on the Democratic National Committee. She later served as a delegate to the 1920 National Convention and became the first woman in either major party to serve as national vice-chairman. Williams worked closely with the Shelby County delegation in the struggle for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. She remained active in Democratic politics and enjoyed a close friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt in later years.

Charl Williams's talent and experience in partisan politics also served her well in her professional career. In 1921 the National Education Association (NEA) elected her to the
presidency, making her the youngest and the first rural and Southern woman so elected. The success of her tenure as president immediately led to a salaried position with the NEA as national field secretary. She served with distinction in that office until she retired, traveling thirty to fifty thousand miles per year, lecturing, serving on a variety of boards and committees, and writing numerous articles and two books on educational reform.

In 1935 Charl Williams was elected president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the first educator to hold that post. The College of William and Mary awarded Williams an honorary Phi Beta Kappa membership, and Southwestern (now Rhodes) College granted her an honorary doctorate. Following her 1950 retirement, Williams took a ten-thousand-mile tour of the Soviet Union, parts of the Near East, and Greece. Charl Williams died on January 14, 1969, in Washington, D.C.

Scope and contents

The collection comprises correspondence, photographs, publications and ephemera, and scrapbooks which contain photographs and newspaper clippings of events and activities the Williams sisters and members of their family were involved in.

Subject terms

Education—Tennessee—Memphis.
Hughes, Mabel, 1881-1970.
Williams, Charl Ormond, 1885-1969.

Related collections


Inventory

Folder

Box 1

“The Sam Allen Brick House in Raleigh, Tennessee”. A family history written by Mabel Williams Hughes.

Genealogical information on the Withers family of Virginia and related correspondence. James Withers, 1943, 1949 and undated.

Photographs, brochures, correspondence, programs from Mabel W. Hughes’ trip to Hawaii, 1946-1951.

Mrs. E. W. Hale’s obituary, a friend of Mabel Hughes, Commercial Appeal, March 6, 1954. National Education Association.

Dr. Caroline S. Woodruff’s obituary, former President of the National Education Association, undated.

“We Take Our Stand…” The News & Courier (Charlotte, South Carolina), undated. The booklet provides the South’s viewpoint on its laws and racial customs.

Meredith, Ellis. “Department of Education for Cabinet.” The Democratic Digest, April 1936, p. 25. The article concerns a radio interview with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt by Charl O. Williams.

Photographs of Lawrence T. Hughes, son of Mabel Hughes. A 101st Airborne Division Association card, 1946.

Correspondence related to obtaining a hardship discharge from U.S. Army for Lawrence T. Hughes, 1951 September – October

Correspondence, financial statements, receipts related to settlement of the estate of Louis Wearen Hughes. Mabel Hughes was the executrix of the estate, 1941-1947.


Correspondence to: 1944, 1948

Mabel Hughes from Ruby Hughes (daughter). Wedding reception announcement of Ruby Hughes and Harrold Jones

Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Harrold Jones (son-in-law)

Correspondence between Mabel Hughes and Claire Allen (granddaughter and daughter of Ruby Jones), 1952 and undated.

Shelby County Court proceedings, statement on schools by Mabel Williams, Superintendent, 1911.

Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Merle Williams Wilbourne (sister), 1948.

Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Colonel Hartwell Williams (brother), 1939, 1941 and undated.

Miscellaneous correspondence received by Mabel Hughes, 1948.

Correspondence to: 1957,

Mabel Hughes from Lawrence Williams (brother)

Lawrence Williams from Stanley Rose

Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Aunt Sallie, 1940, 1949-1950.

Correspondence to Merle Williams Wilbourne, 1948-1957.

Letter to Charl, Hartwell Williams and Florence Williams (sister-in-law and wife of Hartwell), from Merle Williams Wilbourne, 1927 January 4

Letter written to L. W. Hughes by his wife Mabel on the occasion of her visit to the
White House for a luncheon with President and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, 1937 January 12.

24 Correspondence re: Mexico trip, 1944
25 Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Florence Williams, 1941, 1948.
26 Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Lawrence, undated.
27 Correspondence to:
   1. Mabel Hughes, Merle Williams Wilbourne and rest of the family from Charl Williams. Correspondence relating to luncheon at the White House with President and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, 1933.

28 Recommendation letter for Mrs. Wilbourne as postmaster, undated.
29 Acknowledgement letter to Lawrence T. Hughes. A book was donated to Memphis Public Library in memory of Mabel Hughes, 1971 March 23.

31 Postcards.
32 Louis W. Hughes’ War Ration books (Books No. 3 and No. 4).
33 Shelby County tax notices on the property located in Arlington, Tenn., 1951.
34 Correspondence to Mabel Hughes from Etta (cousin), 1940 January 25.
35 Mabel Hughes’ membership cards, I.D. cards, credit cards and name tags.

37 25th Annual Session Memphis Conference Woman’s Missionary Society. Menu and Program for the Silver Anniversary Dinner held in Union City, Tenn., 1936 April 14

38 National Congress of Mothers Magazine, 1906 November
39 Parent-Teachers Association and National Congress of Parents and Teachers. Correspondence, news releases, programs, 1939-1952.
40 Wharton, Mildred, W., The National Congress Program of Cooperation with Teacher-Education Institutions, 1946 December 2
43 Program for “An Evening Musicale, Friday, December 7th, at Eight O’clock at DeShazo College of Music, 1264 Linden Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, undated. Claire Hughes performs.
44 Correspondence: Lawrence Hughes wounded in action, 1945.
45 Black photo album/scrapbook containing photographs, articles from National Parent-Teacher magazine, certificates, postcards, etc. Divided into two folders:
Brown photo album/scrapbook containing photographs, certificates, postcards, articles about the unveiling of the portrait of Mabel Hughes, etc. Divided into two folders:

1: 1943-1962.


“An Account of the Southern Agrarians” by Charlotte Ormond Williams, 42pp., 1942.

“Distinguished Southerners Outside the Southeast” questionnaire from the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1946. Questionnaire was filled out by Charl Williams.

Photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt presenting the Herbert Schiff Memorial Trophy to 1st Lieutenant David L. Cloud, USMC, 1934 January 24.


Photograph of Charl Williams, NEA; Memo to Charl Williams from Roy K. Wilson, Director of NEA Division Press and Radio Relations, 1958 August 13.

Photograph of past NEA Presidents at the New York City Convention, 1954.

Typewritten list of Charl Williams’ personal property with instructions on disposition upon her death, undated


Itinerary and installments 1-8.
Installments 9-14.

Travel diary/letters written by Charl Williams while on her trip around the world, 1953.

Installments 1-9 with #1 and #7 missing.

Carbon copy of letter to Charl Williams from Eleanor Roosevelt concerning Williams’ trip, 1953 January 11.

Travel diary/letters written by Charl Williams while on her trip around the world.

Installments 10-13 with #11 missing, 1953.

Travel diary/letters written by Charl Williams while on her trip around the world.

Installments 14-16, 1953.

**Box 2**

1 Correspondence to Merle Wilbourne from Charl Williams, 1948 November 30.
2 Newspaper clippings related to Charl Williams’ visit to Russia, 1955.
5 “Separation and religion” by C. Stanley Lowell and “A Ten-Year Balance Sheet of the Fight for Separation with Question for a Catholic Presidential Candidate” in which Williams is listed on the Executive Committee of the Protestants and Other Americans United (POAU) for Separation of Church and State, 1957.
6 Description of the military funeral of Colonel Hartwell Williams in letter to Mabel Hughes from Virginia N. Mills (NEA), 1957; letter to “family” from Charl Williams, 1957; letter to Charl Williams from Hartwell Williams enclosing letter from Lawrence, undated.


8 Correspondence to Lawrence Hughes Jr. from Charl Williams, 1955 August.

9 Program: Mission Talk: “Report from Russia” by Charl Williams at the Takoma Park Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, MD, Sabbath School, 9:30-10:40 am, 1956 March 10.

10 Program: Nashville Business and Professional Women’s Club, Dinner meeting, 6:30 p.m. Hermitage Hotel. Dr. Williams was guest speaker. 1934 December 5.

11 Carbon copy letter to Charl Williams from Genevieve Brown, 1957 April 17.

12 Correspondence to:
Mabel Hughes from Charl Williams. The letter was enclosed with a letter to Williams from Edith Helm (secretary to Mrs. “Bess” Truman, wife of President Harry S. Truman), 1947 January 27.
Charl Williams from State Senator Mabel Hughes, 1957 May 7.

13 Correspondence to Charl Williams from Frank (?) on Jim Merrin Co., Automobile Dealer, Memphis, Tenn., letterhead, 1934.

14 Correspondence between Mabel Hughes and Mrs. Eugene (Annil Long) Crutcher, Curator, Fort Nashborough, Nashville, 1939.

15 Copy of note to Charl Williams from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1940 April 18.


17 Photographs (4) of Charl Williams and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt at Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, 1949 May 17.

18 Correspondence to Charl Williams from Charles A. O’Conner, New York antiquarian bookdealer, 1943 April 29.

19 Correspondence to Mrs. George W. Locke from Charl Williams, Washington, D.C., 1948 November 23.

Box 3

Scrapbook on Mabel Williams Hughes, 1944-1951. Contains newspaper clippings, photographs, postcards, personal cards, convention programs, correspondence. Obituary of John Wilbourne (brother-in-law); Marilyn Eastman, B & W photograph; “Background of the Conference” by Charl Ormond Williams, October 1944; and “Mabel Williams Hughes and Charl Ormond Williams Pioneer Teachers” by Imelda Stanton, May 1950.

Box 4

Scrapbook on Mabel Williams Hughes, 1940-1948. Contains various newspaper clippings, convention programs, newsletters and bulletins from National Congress and correspondence during Hughes’ Presidency of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers in 1947-1948. Correspondence to Laurence Thomas
Hughes (Lawrence T. Hughes) from Charl Williams on December 20, 1940.

**Box 5**

Scrapbook on Mabel Williams Hughes, 1940s. Contains various newspaper clippings, photographs, membership cards, personal cards, convention programs, White House correspondence, and telegrams. A lamented tribute card from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* of Mabel Williams Hughes death in 1970; 1904 Certificate of Qualification of Mabel Williams from State Board of Education Tennessee Public Schools; “The Story of My Visit to his Royal Highness and the Duchess of Windsor, Nassau, Bahamas Islands, August 30, 1940” by Charl Ormond Williams; Logan Williams Hughes, son of Mabel Williams Hughes; Tennessee Congress of Parents and Teachers; Larry Hughes (husband); Hughes, L.W. “Call to Membership.” *Bulletin of Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers*, September 1942, page 6-7; and Letter to Mabel Williams Hughes from President Harry S. Truman on January 7, 1947.

**Box 6**

Scrapbook on Mrs. Mabel Williams Hughes and Charl Ormond Williams, 1920-1948. Contains various newspaper clippings, postcards, photographs, personal cards, and correspondence. National Education Association; Shelby County Council of Parent-Teacher Association; Louis Wearen Hughes; correspondence to Mabel Williams Hughes from Charl Ormond Williams in 1928; White House correspondence (secretary of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt); Lawrence T. Hughes; and Robert E. Hughes.

**Box 7**

Scrapbook on Mabel Williams Hughes, 1940-1957. Contains various newspaper clippings, photographs, name plate of Mabel Williams Hughes, telegraphs, membership and registration cards and correspondence. Portrait of Colonel Hartwell W. Williams (1923); correspondence to Mabel Williams Hughes from Merle Williams Wilbourne; newspaper articles about Charl Williams; Logan Williams Hughes; and Certificate of Election.

**Box 8**

Scrapbook on Mrs. Mabel Williams Hughes, 1950’s-1960’s. Contains various newspaper clippings, bulletins and brochures, family photographs, personal cards, postcards, and correspondence. “Honorary Citizen of the State of Florida” to Mabel Williams Hughes; Lawrence “Larry” T. Hughes for County Clerk; Unveiling of the portrait of Mabel W. Hughes; Portrait of Charl Ormond Williams, 1914; and Merle Williams Wilbourne.

**Box 9**

Scrapbook on Mabel Williams Hughes, 1946-1957. Contains various newspaper clippings, programs, telegrams, photographs, cards, and correspondence. Several photographs on “National Board Meeting PTA, May 1949 (Mabel Williams Hughes is National President); Reprint from the *Nation’s Schools*, March 1950 “This I Believe about Public Schools: An Interview with Mrs. Roosevelt by Charl Ormond Williams”; Presidency of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers; “Death Takes E. H. Crump”, *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 16, 1954.
Separated materials

The following material was separated from the collection and disposed of as follows: Allied Military Government, France currency: 5 francs, 1944.

Separated to Special Collections currency collection.