

The District's Oldest Civic Organization Launches Effort to Locate Records of Parallel African-American Organization – The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants (Colored), Incorporated.

When former Historical Society Vice-president and Library Director Gail Redmann McCormick wrote an abstract of the history of the AOI she mentioned a “parallel African-American Organization – The Oldest Inhabitants, Inc. – [that] was founded in 1912, but is no longer active” which prompted AOI Historian, Nelson Rimensnyder, to begin a search for former members of that organization and its records.

Over the course of the past year, Nelson has collected numerous newspaper articles, ephemera and obituaries which reference this organization but he has been unable to find anyone who was personally involved or who might know the whereabouts of their records. Among the artifacts that Nelson located was a program from a dinner event that lists many of the organization's members and the original letters of incorporation (1916).

In December 2009, AOI President Bill Brown and Nelson Rimensnyder approached the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs' Corporations Division to examine and reconcile the records they have on file for various “AOIs.” Their research then took them to the D.C. Archives where, with the assistance of archivist Bill Branch, they were able to locate the Libres, Folios and File Numbers of not only two filings related to the AOI but the incorporation papers of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants (Colored), Incorporated. Incorporated January 15, 1916, the AOI (Colored), Incorporated's mission statement was word-for-word that of the AOI, recognizing their membership to be comprised of African-Americans where the AOI, at the time, was comprised of only white males. Records showed that ‘our’ AOI was first incorporated on June 15, 1903 as the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia and Literary and Historical Society of the United States of America. That title must have been too all encompassing or unwieldy for on October 5, 1903, AOI again incorporated with the much shorter, to-the-point name that we hold today – The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. Armed with the information that was located at the Archives, AOI worked with DCRA's Yusif Gasimov, Program Specialist and Assistant to the Superintendent of Corporations, to reconcile the conflicting and confusing file numbers that DCRA had on record for all of the AOIs. Today, if you query DCRA's website (<http://mblr.dc.gov/corp/lookup/index.asp>) for “Oldest Inhabitants,” you will find that the organizations' correct titles and file numbers are now accessible. In hind sight, this was the easy part...

Nelson's research has found that the AOI (Colored), Inc. was active up until the early 1970s; however, he has been unsuccessful in finding people who either were directly involved in the organization or who had relatives active in the organization other than Alfred Montgomery, one of our members, who has provided Nelson with some invaluable clues and facts for further research. Research reveals that at times the organization's membership rolls exceeded 400! In 1919, they were the guests of the AOI of DC at a joint meeting in recognition of the District's War Veterans (World

War I). Certainly there has to be someone out there who has some knowledge about this very important organization.

During the course of the next year, Nelson and Bill hope to continue Nelson's research and bring to the attention of other District civic, citizen, church and social organizations their quest for the location and preservation of this organization's records and information about its members.

If you have knowledge about the AOI (Colored), Inc. or know of someone who was a member or participant at one of their functions, please contact either Nelson Rimensnyder or Bill Brown at aioifdc@gmail.com. The information you provide may lead them to locate the records of the organization and make arrangements to have them saved for posterity.



October 2011 [President's Message as it appeared in Issue 100 of the Nov. 2011 AOI Newsletter]

The AOI (Colored) Inc. Mystery...Resolved?!

AOI member James Goode was on University Terrace taking a photo of an Art Deco home he plans to include in his next book. He learned from the current resident that the previous owner, Delores Mounsey, had moved to Silver Spring. James tracked her down and learned that her grandfather, William Nixon, had taught art at Dunbar High School for more than 40 years and that it was he who had designed their home in the Palisades.

James arranged to meet Ms. Mounsey with the idea of obtaining several photos to accompany his story and picture about their residence. Upon chatting with the art teacher's descendent, James learned that she had several scrapbooks containing photos, articles and memorabilia of her grandfather's 20 years service from 1942 until 1962...



...as President of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants (Colored) Incorporated! I have spoken with Ms. Mounsey and described Nelson Rimensnyder's and my quest to locate the records of the AOI (Colored), Inc., which, as AOI members know, we want to ensure are preserved for future

generations by donating the original documents or copies of them to an accredited institution such as the Moorland-Spingarn Library at Howard University, the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. or another repository.

The AOI (Colored), Inc. was incorporated January 15, 1916, and its mission statement was word-for-word that of the AOI, recognizing their membership to be comprised of African-Americans males where the AOI, at the time, was comprised of only white males. At times the organization's membership rolls exceeded 400! At one point they were the guests of 'our' AOI at a joint meeting in recognition of the District's World War I veterans.

James Goode, by having his internal 'search engine' engaged, has made an invaluable connection between our two organizations and helped to resolve our mystery.

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Footnote: on November 8, 2011 Bill Brown and Nelson Rimensnyder met with Delores Mounsey in her Silver Spring, Maryland home to discuss and share her grandfather's memorabilia of the AOI (Colored), Inc. Ms. Mounsey had six photo albums containing clippings, photos, articles, pamphlets, brochures and other ephemera ranging from her grandfather's DC Public School report cards (c., 1896), to his participation in numerous African-American benevolent societies, the forerunner of the Federation of Civic Associations and the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants (Colored), Incorporated which he later informally abbreviated to just Oldest Inhabitants Incorporated. Nelson noted a number of dates for newspaper articles for later research to add to his collection of materials on AOI (Colored), Inc., we chatted about Ms. Mounsey's growing up, attending Western High School (note: Bill Brown's and his sister Hulit Pressley Taylor's alma mater) and other memories she had of her grandfather, William Nixon. Delores' sister, Mera, has written a Nook Book about their grandfather entitled, "I Remember Papa." We discussed with Delores the importance of contacting Ida Jones or someone else at Moorland-Spingarn Library at Howard University regarding donating, copying or digitizing her grandfather's collection for the benefit of future researchers. At this time it is quite obvious that given Nelson's and the AOP's quest over the past several years to locate the historic records of the AOI (Colored), Inc., that these may be the only ones that exist, at least that someone has come forward with. Ms. Mounsey seemed somewhat 'surprised' that Howard or anyone would be interested in these materials.

In October 2015, Moorland-Spingarn Library accepted William Nixon's collection, scanned the items, provided copies to Delores Mounsey and her sister and accessioned the collection of scrapbooks into their collection under: Howard University Digital Howard @ Howard University Manuscript Division Finding Aids 10-1-2015 NIXON, WILLIAM MSRC Staff Follow this and additional works at: http://dh.howard.edu/finaid_manu/148.