

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mentioned a “parallel African-American Organization – The Oldest Inhabitants, Inc. – [that] was founded in 1912, but is no longer active” which prompted AOI Historian, Nelson Rimensnyder, to begin a search for former members of that organization and its records.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, Rimensnyder 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 other than Alfred Montgomery, one of AOI's members. Among the artifacts that Rimensnyder located was a program from a dinner event that lists many of the organization's members and the original letters of incorporation (1916). The original signatories to the Letters of Incorporation include: Jerome A. Johnson, Eugene Brooks, David L. Bruce, Leonard C. Bailey, Lloyd H. Brown, Richard H. Hawkins, J.C. Nalle, John I. Jackson, A. T. Brent, William J. Smith, James W. Muse, William A Prater, John L. Hickman, Jonathan H. Paynter, E. Walter Owen Young, G. Summer Wormley and Charles E. Taper.

[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 the original 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...]

Rimensnyder'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 its members, who has provided Rimensnyder with some invaluable clues and facts requiring further investigation. Research reveals that at times the organization's membership rolls exceeded 400! At one point both organizations held a joint meeting in recognition of World War I veterans. Certainly there has to be someone out there who has some knowledge about this very important organization.

During the course of the next year, Rimensnyder and Brown hope to continue Rimensnyder'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 aoi_of_dc@verizon.net. The information you provide may lead them to locate the records of the organization and preserve them for posterity. Their goal is to persuade the holders of these records to donate them to either the Kiplinger Library of the Historical Society of Washington, DC, the Spingarn Library of Howard University or another suitable repository.