

Finding aid for the William Albert Johnson collection Collection 026

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September 13, 2013

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
1986
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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator - Donor	Johnson, William A, 1909-1994
Title	William Albert Johnson papers
Date [inclusive]	1936-1979
Extent	7.44 Linear feet Nineteen boxes
Language	English
Abstract	<p>William Albert Johnson (1909-1994) was a Grand Rapids, Michigan policeman and local politician. Johnson became a patrolman in the Grand Rapids Police Department in 1940. After serving in the Marine Corps during World War II he returned to his old job in Grand Rapids, rising through the ranks to police chief. After retirement, he served on the Grand Rapids Charter Commission and as a city commissioner from the First Ward. The collection includes correspondence, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, papers, four photographs and miscellaneous materials. Included are scrapbooks of newspaper clippings from Johnson's years as police chief, as well as papers documenting his years on the Grand Rapids Charter Commission and as a city commissioner.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

William Albert Johnson was born on June 14, 1909, in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, to William Radcliffe Johnson and Adda L. (Cunningham) Johnson. Both parents had been schoolteachers; his father became a lawyer while his mother raised the family. Johnson attended elementary school in Stewart Township, Fayette County, Pa., and high school in Connellsville. He entered the University of Southern California, but his money ran out the first semester, he returned home and went to work for Kresge's, the 5-and-10-cent store chain.

Kresge's sent Johnson to Grand Rapids, where he worked as a stockman and floorwalker. After subsequent transfer to Port Huron and Flint, Johnson returned to Grand Rapids, ready to take any job he could get. For a while he picked apples. Then he turned to WPA, after which he accepted a position at the United States Gypsum Co. In 1938, Johnson competed with 274 other job seekers for a position in the police department. He took the police examination, which was given at Central High School, and he finished among the top ten applicants.

Johnson started with the police force in 1940, working from the central station as a patrolman. He investigated accidents and walked the beats that included Plainfield Avenue, Lake Drive and downtown areas.

At the beginning of World War II, Johnson enlisted in the Marine Corps and was sent to boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. After basic training and a short stay in North Carolina, he was shipped overseas to Guadalcanal. He was with the Marines at Okinawa and Saipan. Johnson was discharged in January 1946 as a private first class. The war over, he returned to Grand Rapids and his wife, Helen Sargent, whom he had married in 1931. In a short period of time he was promoted to sergeant, lieutenant and the license officer in City Hall.

He was promoted to captain in charge of the traffic bureau, and in 1954 he was named deputy to Police Chief Dewey Beaver. Shortly after, he accepted an offer to go to Saigon to help train Vietnamese police, after receiving special training in Washington, D.C. While in school, he received a call from City Manager Donald Oakes informing Johnson that the police chief Beaver had died of a heart attack. Johnson received and accepted the offer as superintendent of police. He remained in that position until his retirement in 1969.

At 60, the mandatory retirement age in the police department, Johnson went to Grand Valley State College, to set up the newly created school's security department. He retired from that position in 1974. After retiring from the police department, Johnson also entered politics. He successfully ran for the Charter Commission. On the Commission he argued forcefully for electing city officials on a partisan ballot and reforming city government to provide for a strong mayor form of administration. In 1976 he ran for city commissioner from the first ward and defeated Richard Schweiger in the runoff election. In 1980 he ran for re-election but was defeated by George Bowman.

For most of his life, Johnson was a volunteer for one agency or another. In February of 1982 he received a plaque in recognition of his long time service on its advisory board. He was a president of the Metropolitan Garden Council, and was a volunteer at Kent County Community Hospital. As a member

of Kiwanis and the Breakfast Club, he served as a secretary-treasurer; he also served as treasurer for the Area Agency on Aging which covered a nine-county area. Johnson was one of the founders of Project Rehab and was a member of the Senior Neighbors' board of directors. Finally, he spent most of his Fridays at the Kent County prosecutor's office as one of 12 volunteers who processed cases of victims of criminal actions, a program conducted in conjunction with the state's Crime Victims Compensation Board.

Scope and Contents note

The Chief of Police Papers & Scrapbooks describe or portray the activities of the police department during his term as superintendent. The City Commissioner Papers shows the organizations and people that Johnson had contact with during his days as city commissioner for the first ward. But, it is most valuable in describing the different issues that he encountered during his term. The series is divided into sub-series: correspondences, papers, and pamphlets.

The Charter Commission Papers are divided among the following sub-series: correspondence, notes, papers, documents, newspaper clippings, proceedings, financial records, city charters, pamphlets, brochures, presentations, and miscellaneous. These sub series portray the activities of the commission in setting up a new charter for the city.

Photographs pertain to him when he was Chief of police and city commissioner. Overall, these series cover the story of Johnson's professional career in Grand Rapids.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department 1986

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

William Albert Johnson, 1980, accession number 1986.202

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

For official city documents, contact the Grand Rapids City Archives & Records Center

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.). Charter Commission.
- Grand Rapids (Mich.). City Commission.
- Grand Rapids (Mich.). Police Department.

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Politics and government

Series I. Chief of Police Papers and Scrapbooks

Collection Inventory

Series I. Chief of Police Papers and Scrapbooks 1959-1961

Scope and Contents note

Includes regulations that pertained to Johnson and the Grand Rapids Police Department. In addition, there are scrapbooks that describe or show some of the activities that he was involved in during his term as chief of police. Correspondence includes incoming and outgoing letters with Harry Golden (editor of the Carolina Israelite), and police personnel matters.

	Box	Folder
Correspondence 1960-5	1	1
Rules and Regulations 1959	1	2
	Box	Volume
Scrapbooks 1960-1	1	1-2

Series II. Charter Commission 1936-1974, n.d.

Scope and Contents note

This series consists of material that pertains to Johnson and the charter commission. It is valuable in tracing the development of the charter commission in revising and rewriting the Grand Rapids city charter. The time span covers 1970-1973. The series is divided among the following sub series: correspondence brochures, documents, financial records, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, notes, pamphlets, proceedings, and miscellaneous.

Documents

Correspondences provide valuable background information in regards to the revision of the city charter, Johnson's victory in the election for the charter Commission seat, tasks of the commission, legal representation, and the failure of the commission's proposed charter. In addition, there are correspondences that contain comments about the charter commission meetings.

Brochures are valuable in describing the positive aspects of the proposed charter. In addition, there is a message from the charter commission on their work. Documents provide samples of the three proposed charters that were presented or offered by the charter commission, and charters from Michigan cities. In addition, there are copies of the 1951 and 1952 charters, and the Home Rule Act. Furthermore, there are documents that provide valuable information on the pros and cons of the proposed charter.

	Box	Folder
Correspondence 1968- 1973	2	1
Brochure: "How Can The New Charter Help Me," n.d.	2	2

Documents

	Box	Folder
New Charter Committee 1971	2	3
Bill Johnson Says "Yes" to Current Charter Proposal 1970	2	4
City charters: Battle Creek and Saginaw 1936, 1961	2	5
City charters of Kalamazoo and Dearborn 1966, 1942	2	6
City charter of Port Huron 1969	2	7

Newspaper Clippings

Constitutional Provisions of the Home Rule Act, n.d.	2	8
Grand Rapids Survey Analysis 1972	4	1
"Harold Hannah Says No To Current Charter Proposal"	2	9
Home Rule Charter 1952	2	10
Proposed Charter 1971	2	11
Suggested Charter Changes 1970	4	2
Proposed Charter of Grand Rapids 1971	2	12
Rules and Regulations of Procedure and Organization of the 1951 Charter Commission of Grand Rapids, Michigan 1951	2	13
Second Proposed Charter of Grand Rapids 1972	2	14
Third Proposed Charter of Grand Rapids 1972	2	15
Financial record,1970	3	1
So you Want A New Municipal Charter” 1965	3	2
Newspaper Clippings		
	Box	Folder

Notes

1970-1971	3	3
1970-1973	3	4
Mar 30, 1970-Oct 30, 1971	3	5
Apr 7, 1970; Oct 20, 1971	3	6
Nov 4, 1971-Mar 30, 1972	3	7
1972-1973	3	8
Responses to Charter Questionnaires 1971	3	9
Second Proposed Charter of Grand Rapids 1972	3	10
Third Proposed Charter of Grand Rapids 1973	3	11
Notes		
	Box	Folder
Apr 14,1970-Dec 11,1972	3	12
Special Election Results 1973	4	3
Pamphlets		
	Box	Folder

Presentations

A Guide for Charter Commissions 1968	3	13
Model City Charter 1964	3	14
Preparation of a Municipal Charter, n.d.	3	15
The Nature and Purpose of a Home Rule City Charter 1971	3	16

Presentations

	Box	Folder
Outline for Talk	4	4
Resume of Joy Bylsma's talk 1970	3	17
WOTV Editorial 1972	3	18
Proceedings 1971-2	3	19
Miscellaneous 1974, n.d,	3	20

Series III. City Commissioner Papers 1969-1979

Scope and Contents note

This series is divided into the following sub-series: correspondence, papers and pamphlets. The majority of the material in this series is papers on subjects that pertain to Johnson and the City Commission. The papers are arranged alphabetically from Affirmative Action Plan to Zainea (City Manager). These papers

Correspondence

contain background information on particular subjects or projects that Johnson was involved with during his years as commissioner of the first ward of Grand Rapids.

Correspondences consist of letters that describe some of the issues that he faced or came across as city commissioner. Some of the important issues include the following: zoning ordinance, community needs and proposals, education, senior housing development, health hazards, construction of the West River Bank Parking, housing inspections, street improvement project, Affirmative Action Plan, landfill site, alley refuse collections, Schaffer Avenue Water main Project, appointment of alternate members to the Board of Zoning Appeals, Chief of Police Robert Anderson Case, Fair Housing Plan, Neighborhood Organizing Project, Johnson's salary and pension, reducing taxes, human rights, Michigan Public Service Commission Case No. U-5545, improvement and sale of city owned vacant lots, contract compliance standards, and the police department. Moreover, there are letters from his constituents that describe their feelings toward his viewpoints on certain issues, and the admiration they had for him as their representative. In addition, there are letters that pertained to invitations that he received to attend local events, and meetings of local organizations.

Pamphlets are valuable in describing some of the issues that pertained to the city commission, and in describing the rules and regulations of the city commission. In addition, there are some pamphlets that contain historical information on Grand Rapids. Those pamphlets that are valuable include: "A Landmark In Cooperation", "City Commission Policy Manual", "Final Report of the Task Force on Citizen Participation", "Forecasting Electric Energy Demand in Michigan", "Handbook for Newly Elected Michigan Municipal Officials", "Proposed 1978 State Plan for Services to the Elderly", "Standing Rules: Grand Rapids City Commission", and "What we do today will be tomorrow's heritage".

Correspondence

	Box	Folder
Jun 13, 1974-Aug 14, 1979	5	1
Jan 19, 1976-Dec 20, 1976	5	2
May 7, 1976-Jun 11, 1979	5	3

Papers

Apr 3, 1978-Apr 17, 1979	5	4
Miscellaneous	5	5
Papers		
	Box	Folder
Affirmative Action Plan 1977	5	6
Annual Salary Rates 1978-9	5	7
Alcoholic Incentive Ladder 1977-8	5	8
Chief Robert Anderson 1979	5	9
Blueberry Lakes Project 1974-8	5	10-11
Board of Zoning Appeals 1976-8	6	1-2
Boards and Commissions 1976-8	6	3-6
Cable Television 1975-6	6	7
Cable TV Consent Agreement 1976-7	6	8
City Administrative Policy 1978	6	9

Papers

City Planning Commission 1976-8	6	10
City Planning Commission 1978-9	7	1
Community Development Committee 1979	7	2
Committee of the Whole 1976-7	7	3
District Court 1977-9	7	4-5
District Court Budget 1980	7	6
Downtown City Project 1976	7	7
Downtown Development Authority 1976-7	7	8
Drain Commissioner 1978	8	1
Eastown Association 191977-8	8	2
Economic Dev. Adm., Title IX Grant 1976	8	3
Electronic Data Processing 1976-8	8	4
Electronic Development Corporation 1976-8	8	5
Family Housing Development 1979	8	6

Papers

City of Flint 1976-7	8	7
Fire Department 1976-9	8	8
Fiscal Committee 1976-7	8	9
Ford Museum 1977	8	10
GRAETC (Grand Rapids Area Employment & Training Council) 1979	8	11
Grand Valley State Colleges 1976-8	8	12
Grand Rapids Riverfront Project Program 1972	9	1
Heidenga news clippings 1977-8	9	2
Hospitals 1978	9	3
Housing Assistance Center 1976-8	9	4-5
Human Relations Commission 1977-9	9	6
Human Resources Department 1977-9	9	7
Humane Society 1976-8	9	8
Int'l City Management Association 1976-7	9	9

Papers

Invocation 1976	9	10
James Knack (City Planner) 1976	9	11
Jellema House 1979	9	12
Job Corps 1978-9	9	13
Junior Chamber of Commerce 1978	9	14
Kent Community Action Program, Inc. 1977-9	10	1-4
Kent County 1970-1	10	5
Kent County Commissioner 1977-9	10	6
Kent County Jail 1977	10	7
Kent County Prosecutor 1977-9	10	8
Kent County Health Department 1978-9	10	9
Kentwood 1966-77	10	10
Latin American Council 1977-9	11	1
Labor Negotiations 1977	11	2

Papers

League of Women Voters 1977-8	11	3
Legislature 1977-9	11	4
Library 1976-8	11	5
Memos 1976-9	11	6
Mental Health 1978	11	7
Meredith, Jere E.(Transportation Dir.) 1978	11	8
Michigan Civil Rights Commission 1978	11	9
Michigan Dept. of Transportation 1977-8	11	10
Michigan State Housing Devel. Authority 1978-9	11	11
Michigan State Police 1978	11	12
Monroe Center Project 1976	11	13
Municipal Utilities 1976-8	11	14
Murray, Ken (Deputy City Manager) 1977	11	15
Museum Association 1977	11	16

Papers

Native Americans 1978	12	1
Neighborhood Associations 1976-7	12	2-3
Neighborhood Improvement 1977-9	12	4
Neighborhood-West Side 1976-8	12	5
Olds Manor. 1978	12	6
Park Department 1977-9	12	7
Parking 1975-8	12	8
Pensions 1976-7	12	9
Planning Commission Meetings 1976-9	12	10
Plant Act 1977	12	11
Police Department 1976-9	13	1-2
Police-Fire Advisory 1978-9	13	3
Polish Heritage Society 1976-7	13	4
Project Proposals 1975-8	13	5

Papers

Public Recreation Board 1966-76	13	6
Red Barn Hearing 1976	14	1-2
Reinstra, M. Howard 1978-9	14	3-4
Retired Senior Volunteer 1976-1979	14	5-6
2050 32nd St. Rezoning - R-1 to P.V.D. 1979	14	7
Sawyer, Hal 1977	15	1
Senior Neighbors 1977-9	15	2-3
Sinking Fund Trustees 1978-9	15	4
Snow Removal 1977-9	15	5
Southwest Community Center 1977	15	6
Street Department 1976-9	15	7
Street Lighting 1975	15	8
Target Area Councils 1977-9	15	9
Tax Abatement 1973-9	15	10

Papers

Tenants' Union 1976	15	11
Tool Lending Library. 1978	15	12
Touche, Ross & Company 1975-7	15	13-14
Transit Authority 1976-8	15	15
Truck Routes 1978	15	16
United Fund 1976-7	16	1
Urban Development Action Grant 1979	16	2
Urban League 1977	16	3
Victimless Crimes 1978	16	4
Walker, City of 1972-9	16	5
Walker, Thomas W. 1975-8	16	6
Waste, n.d.	16	7
Wealthy Street Business Alliance 1978	16	8
Weed Cutting/Rubbish Removal, n.d.	16	9

Pamphlets

West Leonard Business Men's Assoc. 1979	16	10
West Michigan Health Systems Agency 1978-9	16	11
West Michigan Planning 1977-8	16	12
West Michigan Regional Planning Comm. 1977	16	13
Women's Resource Center 1977-8	16	14
Wyoming, City of 1976	16	15
Zainea, Joseph(City Manager) 1976-9	16	16
Miscellaneous 1977-9	17	1-3
Pamphlets		
	Box	Folder
"A Landmark In Cooperation" 1969	18	1
"A Profile of the Partial Skid Rows of Grand Rapids : Their Residents, Businesses, and Social Agencies," n.d.	18	2
Boards and Commissions 1970, 1977	18	3
City Commission Policy Manual 1977	18	4

Pamphlets

Development Proposal for Campau Square Office Building 1978	18	5
Final Report of the Task Force on Citizen Participation 1977	18	6
Forecasting Electric Energy Demand in Michigan 1976	18	7
"GR Music Hall Feasibility Study" 1969	18	8
"Handbook for Newly Elected Michigan Municipal Officials" 1974	18	9
Kent County Substance Abuse 1975	18	10
Program Proposal Public Act 339 1975	18	11
Proposed 1978 State Plan for Services to the Elderly 1977	18	12
Public Management 1977	18	13
Standing Rules: Grand Rapids City Commission 1976	18	14
Regional Service Authority: Preliminary Report of Background Information on Area wide Cooperation Potential 1973	18	15
Substance Abuse Among Michigan's Senior Citizens: Current Issues & Future Directions 1978	18	16
West Control Michigan Transportation System Study, n.d.	18	17

Series IV. Photographs

What we do today will be tomorrow's Heritage" 1976	18	18
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Series IV. Photographs**Scope and Contents note**

Consists of one folder of photographs on William Albert Johnson. Of note is a view of Lassie with a key to the city in her mouth.

	Box	Folder
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Welcoming Lassie (collie dog) to Grand Rapids ca. 1955-1960. Includes a Capital airplane, key to the city. Individuals are, L-R: Fred Barr; unknown; Ted Corson, Manager, Pantlind; Frank Burns, Fire Chief; William Johnson, Police Chief; unknown.	19	1
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Group photo with Abe Drasin at left, William Johnson on the right. Ca. early 1970s?	19	1
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Group photo of 5 men seated in an office, Abe Drasin appears to be speaking. William Johnson is seated at his left (center right in the photo), ca. early 1970s?	19	1
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Group photo, unidentified team. Includes six African American men holding trophies, which read Golden Glove Champions, 1962. Also includes William Johnson in back row, on right.	19	1
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