

Chauncey Downs Collection (AC59)

Introduction:

The Chauncey Downs Collection is a collection focusing on the life of Chauncey Downs. Chauncey Downs was primarily a musician, later also joining a number of social groups. The collection contains mostly photographs and newspapers about his life and career, as well as a large family Bible.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: FIC

Title: Chauncey Downs Collection

Date Range: 1920s-1960s

Physical Size: 1.416 linear feet, (2 boxes)

Repository Location: Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Collection Number: AC59

Donor Information:

Found in collection.

Citation Note:

Chauncey Downs Collection (AC59), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri.

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Biographical Sketch:

Chauncey Downs was a prominent Black musician and social leader in Kansas City. In his youth, he went to the University of Kansas, studying violin. After, he started his career by leading the band Chauncey Downs and the Rinkeydinks (sometimes spelled Rinkey Dinks) in the 1920s. By 1928, the band's name had changed to Chauncey Downs and the Hotel St. Charles Orchestra. However, after ending the 1928 musical season, Downs left the band, not returning to

Kansas City until the 1940s. In 1939, Downs decided to join the Lansing Symphony Orchestra playing the violin, a position which he kept for 2 years. After his return, Chauncey Downs created the Chauncey Downs Orchestra, which played in multiple venues of the next several years. In the 1950s, Downs created the Heart of America Vocational School, a university in which students could learn different trades.

Along with his musical career, Chauncey Downs participated in many different social groups. For example, Downs joined the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the U.S.A., an old fraternal organization dedicated to serving their communities. He also joined the fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, going to their conventions later in life, as well as temporarily serving as a District Deputy for the Masons of West Missouri and Kansas, a role which he held for 6 months. Chauncey Downs also had a family as well, getting married at some point during his life and having had at least one daughter named Chauncetta.

Scope and Content Note:

Series 1: Photographs

Series 1 is bulk of the collection, comprising of multiple photographs. It is separated into 7 distinct folders. Folder 1 is photographs from events at the Casa Loma Ballroom. Folder 2 is Chauncey Downs with his friends and his family members. Folder 3 is miscellaneous photographs, such as candid photos and pictures of people out and about. Folder 4 is comprised of photographs of musicians, bands, and other music groups, either autographed and sent to Chauncey Downs or of his various musical groups. Folder 5 is portrait photographs held within the collection, whether or not the people in them are identified. Folder 6 is Chauncey Downs at social events and with different social groups. Folder 7 is photographs where the people have not been identified, with no way to identify them, and are not portrait photographs either.

Series 2: Alpha Phi Alpha (ΑΦΑ) Related Ephemera

Series 2 is comprised of various ephemera related to Alpha Phi Alpha. Chauncey Downs had joined at some point (presumably during college), and this series comprises of one folder of ephemera from events that Chauncey attended.

Series 3: Correspondence

Series 3 is corresponding to Chauncey Downs, such as telegrams and letters.

Series 4: Miscellaneous Documents and Ephemera

Series 4 is comprised of one folder of various documents and ephemera found within the collection.

Series 5: Newspaper Articles and Clippings

Series 5 is various newspaper clippings relating to Chauncey Downs. Folder 1 is the bulk of the series, comprised of newspaper clippings discussing Chauncey Downs' musical career and his different music groups. Folder 2 is comprised of various social groups that Chauncey Downs was a part of.

Series 6: Advertisements

Series 6 is comprised of one folder of advertisements for concerts, both for Chauncey Downs' musical groups as well as other music groups.

Series 7: Heart of America Training School Documents

Series 7 is comprised of one folder with documents relating to the Heart of America Training School that Chauncey helped to found and run.

Series 8: Certificates

Series 8 is comprised of two unique certificates awarded to Chauncetta Downs, Chauncey Downs' daughter.

Series 9: Manuscript

Series 9 is the Downs Family Bible, contained in its own separate box.

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Photographs

F. 1 Casa Loma

F. 2 Friends and Family

- F. 3 Miscellaneous Photographs
- F. 4 Photographs of various bands, musicians, and music groups
- F. 5 Portrait Photographs
- F. 6 Social Events & Groups
- F. 7 Unidentified People/Groups

Series 2: Alpha Phi Alpha (ΑΦΑ) Related Ephemera

- F. 8 Alpha Phi Alpha Ephemera

Series 3: Correspondence

- F. 9 Miscellaneous Correspondence

Series 4: Miscellaneous Documents and Ephemera

- F. 10 Documents/Ephemera

Series 5: Newspaper Articles and Clippings

- F. 11 Concert & Band Newspaper Clippings
- F. 12 Social Groups Newspaper Clippings

Series 6: Advertisements

- F. 13 Concert Advertisements

Series 7: Heart of America Training School Documents

- F. 14 Heart of America Training School Miscellaneous Documents

Series 8: Certificates

- F. 15 Chauncetta Downs Certificates

Series 9: Manuscript

- F. 16 Illustrated Downs Family Bible

Processed by David J Rocha, Vista, December 2023

Sources

Chauncey Downs Collection (AC59). Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, MO.

“Chauncey Downs & His Rinkey Dinks.” Musicians local 627. Accessed December 27, 2023.

<https://libweb.umkc.edu/spec-col/local627/text/shaw/downs.htm>.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America. “More Information.” Accessed December 27, 2023.

<https://www.elks.org/who/missionStatement.cfm>.