

Ms
Coll
00191B

William Robert (W.R.) Patterson Papers

William Robert (W.R.) Patterson Papers

Dates: 1880-1930 (primarily 1907-1916)

Extent: 1 box (13 cm)

Biographical Information:

William Robert (W.R.) Patterson was born in 1859 in Kent County, Ontario and was the oldest child of Philip Bolling Patterson (1830-1922) and Alcinda Francis Parker (1840-1892). Philip Patterson and Alcinda Parker were both born enslaved in Virginia and escaped to Canada, settling in Chatham, in the 1850s. They married on 4 October 1860, and the couple had twelve children: William Robert (1859), Philip (1863), Thomas (1864), John Henry (1866), James (1868), Lucy “Lulu” Ellen (1870), Kiziah Victoria (1873), Clement Herman (1877), Anna Frances (1879), Prince Albert (1879), Bertia (1883) and Nathaniel Oscar (1885). The family was a musical one with at least three of the siblings, W.R., Thomas and Nathaniel Oscar working as professional musicians. The children grew up on a farm in Harwich township and attended local segregated schools until 1893 when the schools in the area were desegregated. W.R. moved to Hamilton and was involved with music both locally and touring the United States with his first wife, Fannie Harris (1864-1909). After Fannie’s death in 1909, W.R. remarried in 1910 to Mary Morton (1885-?) and settled permanently in Hamilton where he worked as a barber along with organizing and performing in local singing groups. W.R. died in 1931. W.R.’s youngest brother, Nathaniel Oscar (N.O.) was born twenty-five years after W.R. but the brothers maintained a close relationship in adulthood. N.O. began touring as a musician by 1907 when he sang as a baritone soloist in the Old Southland Sextette in Chicago. N.O. married Lillian Belle Isabell (1882-?), a professional vocalist from Norfolk Virginia, on 13 December 1911 in Huron, Ontario. The couple soon began singing with the Famous Canadian Jubilee Singers, a well-known Black spiritual group which was founded in 1879 in Hamilton, Ontario. By March 1914, N.O. had established his own group, the Patterson’s Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company, which featured N.O., his wife Lillian, along with Chonita Hyers (1893-1953) of Amherstburg, Ontario and Hiriam Berry (1894-1983) of Hamilton. The group was first based in Hamilton, but by 1915, had moved to Buffalo, New York. They toured in the United States throughout the war years. N.O. contracted the Spanish Flu while on a visit home to Hamilton and died on 19 October 1918 at age 32.

Scope and Content:

This collection contains letters received by William Robert (W.R.) Patterson from his first wife, Fannie Harris, and brothers, Thomas Patterson and Nathaniel Oscar Patterson, primarily pertaining to personal matters and their careers as singers and vocalists in both Canada and the United States. The largest collection of letters, numbering 22, are from N.O. Patterson to W.R. Patterson which includes a description of his travels throughout the United States and Canada with both the Famous Canadian Jubilee Singers and his own group, the Patterson’s Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company. Ephemera from the Old Southland Sextette and the Patterson’s Jubilee Singers

Ms
Coll
00191B

William Robert (W.R.) Patterson Papers

exist in the collection in the form of two programmes dated from 1907 and [191-]. The collection also contains a small amount of letters to W.R. Patterson from friends, as well as letters to him and his second wife, Mary, from their sons, Robert and Philip, while they are working as porters at the Hotel London in the late 1920s.

Note: See songbooks and ephemera pertaining to the Famous Canadian Jubilee Singers (cap 06343, cap 0644) for related material.

BOX: FOLDER	CONTENTS		DATE(S)
	Letters from Thomas Patterson to W.R Patterson and Mrs. W.R Patterson		
Box 1 Folder 1	Letter from Thom [Patterson] to Mrs. W.R [Fannie] Patterson on The Hotel Bishop, McBain, Michigan letterhead. Postmarked from Clio, Michigan.	States it is too “bad you have no singers to form your club, your choir must be fine with the Orchestra.” Mentions several singers and mutual acquaintances by name. Provides a list of locations for January for mail to be sent	5 January 1908
1:2	Letter from Thom [Patterson] to W.R Patterson on Commercial Hotel, Schoolcraft, Michigan letterhead. Postmarked from Nottawa, Michigan.	Discusses the weather and congratulates W.R on soon being “out of debt in paying for your house.” States it is too bad “your orchestra has gone down in practicing.” Sends love to “all remaining friends” and inquires after Will Holland, the singer.	1 March 1908
	Letter from Mrs. W.R [Fannie] Patterson to W.R Patterson and to Mrs. W.R Patterson from her son, Harry		
1:3	Letter from Fannie to her husband, W.R Patterson on Hotel Imperial, Petersburg, VA letterhead. No envelope.	Writes that she is doing well in Virginia and making good money and encourages him to come down to her. She outlines the work he could do at the hotel and at “the Grand Encampment.” Provides a handwritten program for performances she has planned.	20 Sep [190-]

1:4	Letter from Harry to his mother, Fannie Patterson on Hotel Lamont letterhead from Pittsburgh	Voices concern over wired money that has not arrived as he "had to put up my watch to do it."	18 June 1909
	Letters from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson		
1:5	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Commercial Hotel, Fergus Ontario letterhead.	Inquires whether W.R received his "suitcase and hat 'silk'," which N.O sent express from St. Anns	4 October 1907
1:6	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on New Hotel Columbia letterhead, North Baltimore, Maryland	Writes they recently sung in Toledo and "saw Jim Parker and Aunt Matilda." Reports "Mrs. Cary is quite sick."	22 November 1912
1:7	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on The Taylor Inn, Lodi, Ohio letterhead.	States that "we are doing good business in this state" and will be going to Pennsylvania next. Inquires after family and friends and says he "sometimes wish I was there so I could be working around, tending to business."	5 January 1913
1:8	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson with The Montreal House in Brockville envelope and the Commercial House in Theresa N.Y letterhead. Post-marked in Brockville, Ontario.	Reports they are back in Ontario and "working towards Toronto." Provides a schedule for their performances in Brockville, Kainstown and Mallory Town.	30 December 1913
1:9	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on The Famous Canadian Jubilee Singers letterhead in New Castle, Ont.	Writes that he is taking the G.T.R from Toronto and will be in Hamilton for several hours, "come down to the Barber shop early ... I will be there about 9:50."	18 January 1914
1:10	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company letterhead "En Route"	Gives thanks for forwarding letters. States that the company is making a name for themselves "down this way."	12 March 1914
1:11	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company letterhead, "En Route"	Sends regards to W.R, wife and family. States business is "getting along very well" and currently touring Vermont and heading to New York state next.	6 April 1914

1:12	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Quarter and Concert Company letterhead in Norfolk, VA	Reports they held several concerts between Hamilton and Virginia, with their most recent concert bringing in 800 people. States in Virginia, "the weather is nice and the people treat you fine."	18 May 1914
1:13	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company letterhead in Norfolk, VA	Writes that "we are working north for a while," but that "we may have to stop for awhile until [the war] gets quiet." He also inquires about W.R's family	20 August 1914
1:14	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers Letterhead, postmarked Norfolk, VA	Writes that "things are a little quiet on account of the war." States that he was thinking of coming to Canada but is "afraid they will hold me in Canada and not let me out."	7 October 1914
1:15	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. No envelope. Missing second page.	States that "it is too bad things are so bad in Hamilton" and that "you must not go to war and get killed, I would go myself if I thought the bullets would keep away from me." Inquires whether Hiram Berry is with the Canadian Jubilee Singers	18 October 1914
1:16	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. No envelope.	Writes that his tenant has left the frame house and it is vacant, asks "if you can get a colored family to take it, it will be alright, if you have to reduce the rent lower."	1 December 1914
1:17	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead in Norfolk, VA	Writes that they are "doing Concert Work, it is a little quiet now" and inquires as to whether the house is rented,	20 December 1914
1:18	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Quartet and Concert Company letterhead in Norfolk, VA. Kept in envelope with letter from 20 August 1914.	Provides mailing address in Virginia and inquires after W.R's wife and children.	Monday, 1914
1:19	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. Postmarked from Norfolk, VA	Inquires about hotel work in Hamilton and asks "How the Canadian Jubilee singers getting along."	3 January 1915

1:20	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. Postmarked from Norfolk, VA.	Writes of the nice weather in Virginia and discusses the renting of his house in Hamilton and how he has cut the rent to \$14.	9 January 1915
1:21	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead in Norfolk, VA.	States he received a letter from Mr. Schelter about W.R's "note," which he hopes he will be able to pay, but that he will try to help out if he can.	2 April 1915
1:22	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead in Norfolk, VA	Inquires after the health of W.R's children and writes that his wife, Lillian, has also been ill. States that they are "still travelling" but will "be closing soon" as "business is quiet but if one can make a living now they are doing well."	11 April 1915
1:23	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. Postmarked from Norfolk, VA.	Writes he is pleased that both houses are rented, and inquires what hotels "the boys" are working at. Asks if he has "any trouble crossing the line there from U.S to Canada."	3 May 1915
1:24	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead in Norfolk, VA. No envelope.	Writes that he is saddened to hear that W.R is doing so poorly financially, and that "we are merely making expenses just keeping on the move, you can get any work here of any kind." But that he would send him money tomorrow as "we expect a very good house tonight."	3 June 1915
1:25	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Brooks Bank Note Co., Springfield, Mass., letterhead. Postmarked Ovid, N.Y	Writes that "we are touring N.Y state at present doing very well." Inquires after the income of W.R's recent court case, "Who won the case you or Mr. Morton?"	24 November 1915
1:26	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead. Postmarked from Edmeston Sidney, NY.	Writes that they are "Still on the go" and "have not missed a night since we were in Hamilton." Hopes to come through Hamilton when they finish.	10 April 1916
1:27	Letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson on lined paper. Postmarked from Castle[...], MA.	States they are "On the go" and will close their season later that month. Hopes he will come to Hamilton for awhile.	5 August 1916

1:28	Incomplete letter from N.O Patterson to [W.R Patterson] on Patterson's Jubilee Singers letterhead in Norfolk, VA. Missing the first page.	Inquires "how is the chinaman getting along" and states "we are getting along very well here" even though business is quiet "on account of the war."	[191-]
	Letters to W.R Patterson from friends		
1:29	Letter from Irving Fields to Mr. [W.R] Pat[t]erson. Kept in the envelope with the letter from N.O Patterson to W.R Patterson (6 April 1914)	States he has gotten a job at the Mantle and Refrigerator plant and won't "be able to take the Barber shop."	12 March 1914
1:30	Letter from Cecil Lindo to Will [W.R Patterson] on The Welland, St. Catharines, Ontario letterhead. No envelope.	Apologies for not writing earlier. States that "myself is just the same only lots of work but very small pay."	10 August 1921
	Postcards to W.R Patterson and Mrs. (Mary) W.R Patterson from their sons, Robert and Philip		
1:31	Postcards from Robert Patterson to his parents [W.R Patterson and Mary Patterson] on Hotel London postcards	Writes that he is working in the hotel and states that his brother, Philipp should come as he might be able to get "a job if he is big enough." Inquires after the health of his sister, Marjorie.	20 September 1929 29 October 1929 3 August 1930
1:32	Postcards from Philip Patterson to his parents [W.R Patterson and Mary Patterson] on Hotel London postcards	Writes that he has arrived safely in London, states he won't be able to visit for New Years and provides a new address after a recent move.	30 November 1929 26 December 1929 7 March 1930
1:33	Postcard from Robert and Philip Patterson to their parents [W.R Patterson and Mary Patterson] on Hotel London postcards	States they have arrived back in London safely and inquires after Marjorie	13 November 1929
	Letters to Robert Patterson		
1:34	Letter from [Capt] to Bob [Robert Patterson] on Hotel London, London, Ontario letterhead.	States some children have chickenpox and inquires if Bob would rather have his lesson at the theatre.	n.d
1:35	Letter from Jack to Robert Patterson on Royal Connaught, Hamilton, Ontario letterhead. Postmarked from Hamilton.	States that he "writing this at work" and that he is glad Robert got a job in London "because you need it more than I at that moment" but that if there are any "upcoming let me know right away"	10 September 1929

	Ephemera		
1:36	Wedding invitation for Lula Watkins and Rev. A.L. De Mond	In Montgomery, Alabama	28 June 1900
1:37	Programme broadside for The Old Southland Sextette (2 copies)	Lists N.O Patterson as a Baritone soloist along with the names and roles of the company and the songs performed	[1907]
1:38	Programme broadside for the Patterson's Jubilee Singers	Includes the members of the company, and the songs performed	[191-]
1:39	Transfer ticket for the Hamilton Street Railway Co.	For King West & James N.	n.d
1:40	Holograph listing of the children of W.R Patterson and his first wife, Fannie, and second wife, Mary as well as their first cousins.	Kept inside a <i>Graded Singing School</i> notebook, with several drawings of people by children	[192-]-[193-]
1:41	Calendar and examinations for the Hamilton Conservatory of Music		1929-1930
	Books		
	<i>The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs</i>	Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company	[1880]
	<i>The Canadian Hymnal</i>	Toronto: William Briggs	1894