

**The Filson Historical Society**

**Singleton family  
Papers, 1907-1983**

For information regarding literary and copyright interest for these papers, see the Curator of Special Collections.

Size of Collection:  
0.66 cubic feet

Location Number:  
Mss. A S617

## **Singleton family Papers, 1907-1983**

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Singleton family papers document the personal and professional lives of an African American family in the mid-twentieth century. The collection contains family correspondence, writings, news clippings, and miscellanea. A few documents relate to the National Home Finding Society, an institution founded by Octavius Singleton and located in Irvington, Kentucky. The Society cared for homeless and needy African American children.

Folder 1 contains the correspondence of Octavius Singleton. His correspondence, 1943, 1947-1950, is primarily comprised of letters to his daughters, especially his daughter Alzada. In his letters, written late in his life, Octavius Singleton frequently refers to his travels through his childhood hometown of Edwards, Mississippi and the surrounding region. He paints a picture of rural life among the African Americans who live in the region, giving detailed descriptions of their farms, crops, and animals. His philanthropic work among the people of the area is a frequent subject; he often requests his family to send their excess possessions to the needy in Mississippi and to instruct their friends and associates to do likewise. In an apparent effort to conserve paper, Singleton wrote letters to his family on paper used previously for other purposes. On the verso of his letters, there are portions of letters and literature regarding the National Home Finding Society as well as some of Singleton's other writings.

Folder 2 contains Octavius Singleton's obituary and correspondence from friends and family related to his death.

Folders 3-4 contain the correspondence of the Singleton family. Dated 1941-1971, these folders primarily consist of the correspondence of Alzada Singleton Buford Davis, writing to her family in Kentucky from Washington, D.C. and Cleveland, Ohio. Letters to her daughter, Lenore, are filled with advice, including suggestions on her interactions with others, reprimands for her behavior, and how she can improve on her appearance. She also discusses her work with Samuel Plato's architectural firm and the U.S. Treasury Department during World War II, providing details on her work and coworkers, as well as relating office politics and gossip. Correspondence from the early 1950s touches on the death of Octavius Singleton and the disposition of his property as well as preparations for Lenore to live abroad in France for a year. Her work in Cleveland, Ohio as a real estate broker is mentioned in passing in some of her correspondence. Other letters are written by Alzada's sisters, Eunice Singleton Wilson and Annie Singleton Newhouse, as well as other relatives and friends.

Folder 5 contains resumes and autobiographical accounts of the Singleton family, including Harriet Mentor Singleton, Alzada Singleton Buford Davis, and Lenore Buford.

Folder 6 contains life insurance policies for Octavius Singleton and Harriet Mentor Singleton, as well as assorted funeral programs, and birth and death documents for a number of Singleton family members.

Folder 7 contains writings and short stories. Most appear to be written by Alzada Singleton Buford Davis.

Folder 8 contains newspaper clippings. Included is a 1945 article written by Octavius Singleton about the National Home Finding Society. Other clippings mostly relate to Alzada Singleton Buford Davis' life and work.

Folders 9-10 contain brochures of Central High School and the National Home Finding Society, respectively. Some correspondence to supporters of the National Home Finding Society is also present.

Folder 11 contains correspondence and documents regarding the continued management of the Irvington farm property after Octavius Singleton's death. The farm was the former location of the National Home Finding Society.

Folders 12-14 contain receipts relating to the travel expenses of Alzada Singleton Buford Davis.

Folder 15 contains miscellaneous documents, including a 1953 reporter's pass for the "Associated Negro Press" made out to Lenore Buford, Paris, France.

All photographs were transferred to the Filson's photo archives.

**Additional Resources:**

Records of the National Home Finding Society, 1924-1940. Library of Congress.

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**Biographical Note**

Octavius Singleton was born in 1869 in Edwards, Mississippi to Alex Singleton and Martha Briggs. He attended Southern Christian Institute in Beulah, Mississippi, and then undertook ministerial studies at Hiram College in Ohio. He graduated from Hiram in 1894 and was ordained as a minister. In 1894, he married Harriet Ann Mentor and moved to Louisville, where he was the pastor of Hancock Christian Church, and the principal of the Louisville Christian Bible School. In 1908, he founded the Kentucky Children's Home, with the assistance of Rev. C. H. Parrish and Mrs. Bessie Allen.

Octavius Singleton's concern for homeless and neglected black children throughout the south led him to later found the National Home Finding Society. In 1912, the Society purchased a home at 1716 West Chestnut Street. Initially, Singleton planned to find homes for the children with good families. However, adoption rates were slow and more space was needed. The Society purchased 600 acres of farmland in Irvington, Kentucky, eventually expanding to own close to 1,000 acres. In this location, the young boys of the Home learned to till the soil and the girls learned homemaking skills. The Irvington property accommodated a school and teacher's cottage, barns and farm buildings, and housing for the children. The Society cared for and trained black orphans for over 30 years, prior to the state of Kentucky assuming responsibility for the children.

World War II brought times of increasing hardship to the Home. When combined with the ill health of his wife, these troubles forced Singleton to release the children in his care or find placement for them in other homes. He would spend his final years seeking a church or religious organization to continue the work at Irvington. Singleton also devoted the remaining years of his life to raising money and awareness to the plight of blacks living in his hometown of Edwards, Mississippi and the surrounding region. He died on December 31, 1950.

Alzada Singleton Buford Davis (1898-1983) was one of six children of Octavius Singleton and Harriet Ann Mentor Singleton. She majored in mathematics at Wilberforce University, and also received a Master's Degree in Music Education from Ohio State University. She was a teacher for several years in Oklahoma and Kentucky. She also worked for the Urban League in Louisville, and was head of the Music Department at Wilberforce. During World War II, she worked for the Samuel Plato Construction Company and later, the War Bonds Division of the U.S. Treasury in Washington, D.C. After the war, she became a real estate broker in Cleveland, Ohio, forming her own company. She was also the treasurer for the National Home Finding Society. Alzada had one daughter, Lenore V. Buford, who was Professor of Romance Languages at Cuyahoga Community College.

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**Folder List**

**Box 1**

- Folder 1: Octavius Singleton correspondence, 1943, 1947-1950, undated
- Folder 2: Octavius Singleton obituary and correspondence re: his death, 1951-1952
- Folder 3: Singleton family correspondence, 1941-1949
- Folder 4: Singleton family correspondence, 1950-1971 & undated
- Folder 5: Resumes and autobiographical accounts, undated
- Folder 6: Life insurance policies, vital records, and funeral programs, 1907-1983

**Box 2**

- Folder 7: Writings & short stories, undated
- Folder 8: Newspaper clippings, 1945-1983
- Folder 9: Central High School brochures, 1952, 1957
- Folder 10: National Home Finding Society correspondence, brochures, etc., ca. 1940s-1951
- Folder 11: Letters & documents re: management of Irvington farm property, 1950-1954
- Folder 12: Receipts, 1956-1958
- Folder 13: Receipts, 1959
- Folder 14: Receipts, 1960-1962
- Folder 15: Miscellaneous

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**Subject Headings**

A. M. Buford Real Estate Company.  
Administrative assistants.  
Adoption.  
African American children – Education.  
African American churches.  
African American singers.  
African Americans.  
African Americans – Education – Kentucky.  
African Americans – Education – Mississippi.  
African Americans – Housing – Washington (D.C.)  
Agriculture – Kentucky.  
Agriculture – Mississippi.  
Anderson, Marian, 1897-1993.  
Banks and banking.  
Buford, Lenore Victoria, 1930-2014.  
Businesswomen.  
Central High School (Louisville, Ky.)  
Child support.  
Child welfare.  
Children – Institutional care.  
Christian life.  
Christianity.  
Clergy – Kentucky.  
Clothing and dress.  
Communism.  
Communism and Christianity.  
Cooking, American.  
Dating (Social customs)  
Davis, Alzada Singleton Buford, 1898-1983.  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.  
Domestic relations.  
Easter, Luke.  
Edwards (Miss.)  
Etiquette for children and teenagers.  
Eugenics.  
Fisk University.  
Football.  
Gospel music.

Greek letter societies – United States.  
Hinds County (Miss.)  
Hiram College.  
Homeowners.  
Human beings – Effect of environment on.  
Interracial marriage.  
Journalism.  
Mentally ill.  
Missionaries – Africa.  
Mississippi – Description and travel.  
National Home Finding Society.  
Nature and nurture.  
Newhouse, Annie Singleton, 1895-1983.  
Oil wells.  
Orphanages – Kentucky.  
Orphans – Kentucky.  
Plato, Samuel, 1882-1957.  
Political activists.  
Presidents – United States – Election – 1948.  
Race relations.  
Rationing – United States.  
Real estate business.  
Religious leaders.  
Samuel Plato Construction Company.  
Secretaries.  
Segregation and the press.  
Singleton, Harriet Mentor, 1878-1947.  
Singleton, Octavius, 1869-1950.  
Schools – Kentucky.  
Southern Christian Institute (Edwards, Miss.)  
Teachers – Employment – Kentucky.  
Transportation – Washington (D.C.)  
United States. Department of the Treasury.  
United States. War Relocation Authority.  
Wilson, Eunice Singleton, 1900-1983.  
Women – Education.  
Women – Employment.  
Women-owned business enterprises.  
World War, 1939-1945.  
World War, 1939-1945 – Children.