

**The Papers of
Charlotte
Hawkins Brown
1883-1961**



*Guide to the Scholarly Resources
Microfilm Edition*

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Introduction

Charlotte Hawkins Brown was the founder and principal of the Palmer Memorial Institute, in Sedalia, North Carolina, a quiet rural village consisting of fifty or more families, mostly African Americans, ten miles east of Greensboro. Although reared and educated in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she was born in Henderson, North Carolina, on June 11, 1883. Her mother, Caroline Frances, was the twelfth child of Mingo and Rebecca Hawkins. Her father, Edmund H. Hight, from whom she was separated at birth, belonged to a family that lived on the adjoining plantation.

About the time that Brown was born, African Americans were leaving for northern cities in large numbers, and Boston had become the mecca for many of the progressive blacks in the eastern section of North Carolina. Brown's family moved to Cambridge in 1888 where Brown attended public schools. Her first graduation was a momentous occasion for the family as she was the chosen speaker from the famous Allston Grammar School in Cambridge. She next attended the Cambridge English High School. In her senior year she met Alice Freeman Palmer, former president of Wellesley College. Palmer took an interest in Brown and encouraged her with both words and financial support to attend The State Normal School at Salem.

Brown returned with her mother to Henderson almost annually. These frequent visits caused Brown to carry with her vivid pictures of the area in which she was born. Thus, after a year of junior college, Brown accepted a \$25-per-month job from the American Missionary Association (AMA) and returned to her home state to teach poor, rural blacks. She arrived at a rundown Bethany Institute in Sedalia in 1901. Her desire to help African Americans in the South drove her to begin repairs, but the

AMA decided to close the school. Without a job, Brown was encouraged by local African Americans to start her own school. The young 18 year old virtually single-handedly made it happen. Brown secured money and encouragement from her friends in the North and moved the school across the street to a blacksmith's shed. She soon raised enough money to build a campus with more than two hundred acres and two new buildings. She selected an initial board of trustees who were all African American, unlike the trustees at other schools of that era—even African American-oriented schools. After hiring a small staff and securing the additional support of local black and white leaders, Palmer Memorial Institute (Palmer) began operations. Located east of Greensboro, Palmer began in 1902 as a rural African-American school and succeeded as a unique private school for more than sixty years. Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown was its founder and leader for fifty of those years.

Palmer offered to rural African-American youth an unusual opportunity for cultural learning. The school's goal was to provide a facility where blacks could escape the then common assumption that African Americans were innately inferior to whites and did not need any schooling beyond vocational training.

In 1900, North Carolina had more than two thousand privately operated schools for African Americans. Most teachers, however, had only an elementary school education and could instruct their students only up to that level. Palmer was different because Brown was offering college preparatory instruction in a junior and senior high school setting. Classes included drama, music, art, math, literature, and romance languages. Students were divided into small circle groups with teachers who served as counselors and advisers. Each student received personal training in

character development and appearance. All students had to work one hour per day for the school.

Brown married Edward Sumner Brown, an alumni of Harvard University in 1911. Mr. Brown taught at Palmer after their wedding until the marriage disintegrated five years later. By 1915, Palmer had gained support from national figures such as educational leader Booker T. Washington, Harvard University's President Charles William Eliot, and Boston philanthropists Carrie and Galen Stone. The Stones, white northerners, became Palmer's largest donors. They were the first large donors to support the institute because of its holistic approach to total education and its quality liberal arts programs to educate black Americans beyond basic training levels.

After a major fire destroyed two of six main buildings in 1917, Brown's determination to raise enough money to offset the loss prevented the school's closing. This successful effort also encouraged increased biracial, or both black and white, cooperation for Palmer and its community. Brown shared ideas with black educators Mary McLeod Bethune and Nannie Helen Burroughs. Together these three women were known as the "Three Bs of Education." The Three Bs believed in combining a holistic triangle of ideas and lessons to achieve racial equality: Brown's triangle combined education, religion, and deeds; Bethune's triangle was "the head, the heart, and the hand"; Burroughs's was "the book, the Bible, and the broom." By the mid-1920s, Brown was a nationally known speaker who stressed teaching these concepts through culture and liberal arts for racial uplift. She was active in the National Council of Negro Women and the N.C. Teachers Association and was the first African-American woman to serve on the national board of the Young Women's Christian Association. In 1952, Brown

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retired after fifty years. Following a long illness she died in 1961 and was buried with great honor on the campus she loved.

Palmer Memorial Institute has become a state historic site. It was the first state-supported site to honor the contributions of African-Americans and women. Ongoing programs depict the history and development of African-American education in North Carolina.

Scope and Content

This collection provides information about Charlotte Hawkins Brown's life and activities, about Palmer Memorial Institute, and particularly about Brown's continuing struggle to enlarge the school, the financial problems she encountered, and her constant fund-raising efforts. It is arranged in three series:

- I. Personal and biographical
- II. Correspondence
- III. Palmer Memorial Institute

Series I, Personal and biographical, contains biographical material by Brown and by others, including an incomplete draft of an unpublished biography of Brown by Ceci Jenkins. There are also speeches and writings by Brown, certificates, awards and honorary degrees received by Brown, and photographs of her and others. Of her speeches Brown said, "For the most part [they]... are along social lines of uplift and general educational practice" ("The Quest of Culture," 1929, in Item #14). The writings and speeches included here are mainly about race relations and Negro women and were delivered on such occasions as meetings, anniversaries, memorial services, graduations, and on receiving honors. The series begins with the biographical papers, followed by speeches and writings, awards and honors, and photographs.

Series II, Correspondence, contains mainly letters to and from Brown. Many of the letters to Brown are letters of congratulation. Much of the correspondence deals with PMI: fund-raising, expansion, and events. Dated correspondence is arranged chronologically. No attempt was made to reconstruct the chronology of the undated letters, which

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follow the dated correspondence and are arranged in two alphabetical groups: from Brown and to Brown. There is one folder of letters from others to others. An Index of Correspondents follows the inventory.

Series III, Palmer Memorial Institute, is divided into two sections: Administration and Students, each arranged chronologically. The first contains copies of the charter (1907) and the constitution and by-laws (1908), various reports by Brown to the Board of Trustees, reports by the staff to Brown, some financial and fund-raising records, brochures, press releases, programs, scrapbooks and photographs. The second section includes documents about student activities, publications, and essays about PMI. Such items as the scrapbooks, photographs, and clippings document both the administration of PMI and its students.

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Series I. PERSONAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL

By Charlotte Hawkins

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | "A Biography" |
| | 2 | "Some Incidents in the Life and Career of Charlotte Hawkins Brown Growing out of Racial Situations, at the Request of Dr. Ralph Bunche" |
| | 3 | "Taking You into My Confidence about Palmer Memorial" |
| | 4 | "My Theory of Public Speaking"
"Formal Training (Explanation)" |

About Charlotte Hawkins Brown

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- | | |
|---|---|
| 5 | By Francis Wilson, Wilhelmina Crosson (poem), Edna Arter, Lucinda Lancy Saunders, William Pickens, Joseph V. Baker, 1916-45 |
| 6 | By Leonard H. Bell and unsigned, n.d. |

"The Twig Bender of Sedalia," by Ceci Jenkins, ca. 1946

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 7 | Incomplete draft, corrected ts. |
|---|---------------------------------|

Notebooks

- | | |
|----|----------------------------|
| 8 | "Notes" |
| 9 | "Early Life" |
| 10 | "Personal Characteristics" |
| 11 | "Ebony Questionnaire" |
| 12 | "Miscellaneous Subjects" |
| 13 | Clippings, 1925-61, n.d. |

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Roll **Folder**
No. **No.**

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- 1 14 1920-29
 15 1931-ca. 1939
 16 1941-44
 17 1945-47; includes correspondence, programs
 18 n.d.
 19 CHB writings: ts.cc., mimeo., n.d., also
 Mammy, printed 1919

Certificates, Awards, Honorary Degrees

- 20 1900, 1921-45, n.d.; includes fund appeal
21 1901, 1944-59, n.d.; includes correspondence,
 program, clippings

Plaques

- 22 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Greensboro, N.C., 1949
23 N[ational] A[ssociation of] C[olored]
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24 Bethel A.M.E. Church, Greensboro, N.C., 1954
25 The Utility Club, Inc., of N.Y. City, 1955
26 The Daughters of I.B.P.O.E. of W., 1955
27 Southeastern District Women's Clubs, 1961
28 Photographs of CHB, ca. 1915?, n.d.; her
 mother, Caroline Hawkins Willis, 1924; also
 Mary S. Locke, 1929, Booker T. Washington,
 n.d. FILED IN PHOTOGRAPH DRAWER.
 See also #68.
29 Miscellaneous:
 Programs of events in which CHB
 participated, 1935, 1947

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1	29	"Public School Expenditures, Black and White" (pamphlet), Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Inc., May 1942 CHB's Daughters of I.B.P.O.E. of W. passbook, 1946-47 etc.

**Series II. CORRESPONDENCE
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	31	1907
	32	1908-09
	33	1910-11
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	35	1914-15
	36	1916
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	38	May-Dec. 1917
	39	1918
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	44	July-Dec. 1921
	45	1922-29, 1931-32
	46	1933-34
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	48	1939-41
	49	1943-48
	50	From CHB, n.d.

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Roll Folder
No. No.

To Brown

- 3 51 B
52 C
53 D-G
54 H-V
55 Others to others, n.d.

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- 4 56 Charter, 1907; Constitution and By-Laws, 1908; organizational chart, n.d.
57 CHB reports to Board of Trustees and American Missionary Association, 1922-43 (scattered)
58 Reports to CHB by administrative dean, dean, bookkeeper, publicity secretary, 1934-35, 194?, n.d.
59 Minutes of annual meeting of Board of Trustees, April 25, 1947
60 Financial records, including correspondence, 1919-47 (scattered). *See also* #68.
61 Fund-raising, including lists of contributors and sponsors, correspondence, 1911-41. *See also* #20.
62 Brochures, ca.1919-51, n.d.
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	67	"Thirty-fifth Anniversary Exercises, April 23-25, 1937 [<i>sic</i>]"

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- 68 Scrapbook, 1916-24, n.d. Also invitations, clippings, financial information (1916-17), and programs, including The Sedalia Singers
- 69 Students, events, buildings, n.d. Sedalia Public School, 1938-39
- 70 Building, identified on verso as "Dr. Brown's School"
- 71 Clippings, program, picture postcards 1918-46, n.d.

*[FILED IN PHOTOGRAPH DRAWER]

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- 72 Graduates: includes correspondence and questionnaire, 1917, 1939, n.d.
- 73 Activities, 1917-48, n.d. Includes The Sedalia Singers; script of 1928 pageant, The Will and the Way; programs, clippings
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