Lewis Family Photographs

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Provenance: Images copied with permission of Roberta Hankamer.

Collection ID: PP001

Dates: ca. 1900-1920s

Extent: 1 folder and 14 negative sleeves, containing about 400 photographs

Processing and finding aid: Brittany Fox, February 2020

Languages: English

Access: Collection is available for research under the CHC rules of use

Collection Description:

This collection chronicles a section of the longstanding and prolific Lewis family of Cambridge, Mass. Acquired during a photo gathering project conducted by the Cambridge Historical Commission, this collection is comprised of surrogate records created from five Lewis family albums. The albums cover a period of about 20 years (1900-1920) that is not otherwise represented in historical accounts of the Lewis family.

Many of the photographs from the album depict unidentified individuals but some are labelled. Most of the named individuals are of the Lewis family, including George W. Lewis, Nancy E. Lewis, Elizabeth E. Lewis, Jerome Lewis, Benzina Reese, Ethel Lewis, Andrew Lewis, Alma Lewis, and Maurice Brooks. Other families represented are the Harris and Morris families, namely Anthony Harris, Julia Harris, Sue Harris, Bob Morris, and Ida Morris. Other noted individuals include David Houston, Thomas M. Thomas, Ed Robinson, Parker Laing, and Emille Bass. Of special interest are an image of William Ashbie Hawkins, one of Baltimore’s first African American lawyers, and a signed image of Clarence Cameron White, an African American composer.

Additional people of unknown origin or background include Nellie Sorrell, Henry Robbins, Samuel Lee, Leila Stubbs, Vic Blackwell, Nora Wingfield, E.C. Beuzard, and Charles Vanderhoop. Also present are several people with only their first names provided.

The photographs depicted range from individual portraits to group images. Many of the group images were taken at 47 Parker Street in Cambridge but there are also scenes of the Lewis family summer home at Billington Sea, Plymouth, Mass. Other locations include 26 Parker Street, the Cambridge Public Library, and Caledonian Grove in West Roxbury.

Historical Sketch:

The Lewis family has been noted for its contributions to 19th century Cambridge. Beginning with Peter Pitts Lewis and Minor Walker Lewis who moved to Cambridge from Barre, Massachusetts in 1821, the family engaged in many abolitionist efforts. Their
home on Garden Street and other houses built nearby by African Americans comprise a settlement popularly known as “Lewisville.” Peter and Minor had nine children, most of whom became leading members in local associations, including the Paul Humane Society, the Massachusetts General Colored Association, the Boston Vigilance Committee, the African Baptist Church, and the First Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Their eldest son, Enoch Lewis, founded the Cambridge Liberian Emigrant Association and with his brother Samuel A. Lewis established the Cambridge colony in Liberia. Prior to his emigration, Enoch and others in his immediate family also worked for Harvard University, mainly as custodians. Enoch’s death on April 7, 1859 was recounted in The African Repository by Dr. Daniel Laing, who was one of the first black Harvard students, although he was expelled before receiving his degree as a physician due to his race.

Samuel A. Lewis married his first wife Susannah (Sukey) Maldree in 1815 and they had seven children, Mary (Maria) Jane, Samuel Alexander Jr., Susan, Jeremiah, Moses M., John Levy (Levi), and George Washington Lewis. Samuel A. Lewis later married his second wife Elizabeth Munroe in 1841 and they had two children, Victoria and Joseph. Samuel A. Lewis died in 1852 and Elizabeth was his widow until 1872.

Samuel’s son, George W. Lewis (Sr.) was born on February 2, 1824 in Barre and married Eleanor Robinson Williams in 1846. They moved to Garden Street in Cambridge by the 1850s. In 1851, Lewis purchased a house on Wallace (now Walker) Street from his uncle Andress. During his time in Cambridge, George Sr. was employed as a porter at Harvard University and as a steward of Harvard’s Porcellian Club. He and Eleanor had four children, Eva, Jerome, Eleanor, and George Washington Lewis (Jr.). Jerome Washington Lewis was born on July 2, 1848 and Eleanor Malvina Lewis was born on March 17, 1846. She was blind.

George Washington Lewis (Jr.) was born in 1848 in Cambridge. He marks the oldest individual present in the photographs in this collection, often referenced as Dad or Pa. In 1876 he succeeded his father as steward of the Porcellian Club and remained there for over 45 years. On October 11, 1872 he married Nancy E. Poole--referenced as Ma in this collection. Nancy was born ca. 1852 in Columbia, South Carolina. George and Nancy had five children, Elizabeth E. Lewis, Jerome Theodore Lewis, Walter E. Lewis, George Colman Lewis, and Ethel A. Lewis. In the 1893 Cambridge City Directory, George W. Lewis Jr. was identified as a janitor working at 444 Harvard Street, also known as the Hilton’s Building. That year he was also marked as residing at 21 South Street. In 1897 George W. Lewis Jr. purchased 47 Parker Street, where he and his family were noted for hosting amateur theatrical productions and housing black Harvard undergraduates. George died in 1929 and Nancy died in 1942.

Their eldest son, Jerome Theodore Lewis, was born on November 21, 1872. He worked as a laborer for the Ford Motors Co. plant at 400 Brookline Street. He married Margaret A. Lewis. Another son, Walter E. Lewis was born in November 1876 and died August 23, 1880. Little is known about him.

George Jr. and Nancy’s youngest son, George Colman Lewis, was born in Columbia, South Carolina in 1875. By the 1890s he was a member of the Cambridge Social Union Debating Club and in 1892 he graduated from the Cambridge Manual Training School. He belonged to the Riverside Cycle Club, an exclusively black club in Cambridge. At
various points throughout his life George C. worked as a railroad worker but attempted a career change ca. 1900 when he became a tailor at 29 Boylston Street. He soon returned to the railroad industry as a porter. He died on August 19, 1906 at the Mt. Auburn Hospital of heart disease when he was 31 years old.

George Jr. and Nancy’s daughter Ethel A. Lewis was born in South Carolina in October 1878. According to articles in the Cambridge Chronicle, she attended Sunday School at Christ Church and partook in the Girls’ Friendly Society in Cambridge, two organizations that connect her to other individuals in this collection. In the 1900 Census she is cited as working as a stenographer. Ancestry.com states that ca. 1903 she graduated from Bryant & Stratton Commercial College and by 1905 she was a teacher at Simmons College. Her efforts as a stenographer supported a book published by the Colored Citizens of Greater Boston and the Garrison Centenary Committee of the Suffrage League of Boston and Vicinity. The Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of William Lloyd Garrison was published in 1906 and is available as an online Google Book. Ethel moved to Baltimore, Maryland in 1906 to become a schoolteacher and stenographer.

George Jr. and Nancy’s other daughter was Elizabeth Estelle Lewis. She went by various nicknames including Bessie, Birdie, Bess, and Aunt Lizzie. She was born in South Carolina in November 1880. She worked as a bookkeeper and married Maurice Jefferson Brooks on October 20, 1910. It is likely that “Vic” Blackwell, Nora Wingfield, and Leila Stubbs were her bridesmaids. At the time of their marriage, Maurice Brooks (1879-1913) was a porter from Washington D.C. living in Boston. They had one son, Jerome Theodore Lewis, named after Elizabeth’s brother. When Maurice died in 1913, she moved back in with her parents, George W. Lewis Jr. and Nancy Lewis. Her death date is unknown, but Elizabeth was alive at least until 1954 according to the city directory of that year.

Elizabeth and Maurice’s son, Jerome T. Lewis (1922-1976) was the long-term holder of the photographs in this collection. As a child, he was recognized by the Cambridge Chronicle for his Boy Scouts efforts and he was referenced as the captain of the Rindge Technical School track team. After graduating from the Rindge Technical School in 1941, he went to Colby College and received a library science degree from Simmons College in 1949. While a student, he worked for the Harvard libraries from 1946 to 1959. During his professional career, Jerome worked for the Newton Free Library and Bryant & Stratton. He subsequently worked for the Cambridge Public Library and held the position of Assistant Director from 1970 until his death in 1976. In February 1977 the community room of the Central Square Library was dedicated in his name. Jerome T. Lewis never married or had children. In some unknown manner the photographs in this collection came to the attention of Roberta Hankamer, the Head Librarian at the Grand Lodge of Masons in Boston, who in July 1980 lent the Cambridge Historical Commission five albums of Lewis family photographs so they could be copied in conjunction with the Commission’s Photo History project.

Other named individuals present in this collection

The information gathered for this section was drawn from various articles of the Cambridge Newspaper Database, City Directories (1903, 1908, 1921), and Census
records (1910, 1920, 1930). Much of the information presented in this section should be regarded as speculative due to the ambiguous labelling of the photographs and the limited availability of cross-references. Further research is advised.

Andrew (Andy) Lewis worked with the Mardi Gras Beauties, a burlesque group, for a performance at Waldron’s Casino on Hanover Street in 1909. Local newspapers often called him by his nickname, Andy. It is possible that he lived at 55 Granville Road, Cambridge.

Alma Lewis was cited in 1937 as being from Boston. She worked closely with the Cambridge Community Center. In 1971 she was honored by the Cambridge Friends of the National Center of Afro-American Artists at an event held at 122 Elm Hill Ave in Roxbury.

Isaac Logan was a nephew of Nancy and George W. Lewis. The 1900 census cites him as an assistant steward, residing with his aunt and uncle in Cambridge. He was born in July 1878 in South Carolina.

Benzina Reese was born in October 1873 in South Carolina. She was Nancy Lewis’s niece, according to a 1902 Cambridge Chronicle article and the 1900 census. An 1892 article mentions her as performing “The War of the Roses” with the Girls’ Friendly Society of Christ Church-- further connecting her to Anthony Harris and Ethel Lewis. The 1900 census lists Benzina as working as an office girl. In 1902 she married Frederick Sandford Gray, making her the Mrs. Gray of this collection. At some point they moved to 10 Chestnut Street in Plymouth, Mass., where Frederick worked as a chef. They had three children: Herman F., Helen E. and Leslie R. Gray.

Herman Frederick Gray (sometimes spelled Hermon) was born on July 22, 1906 in Plymouth, Mass. On June 15, 1938 he married Ruth Sublet King in Richmond, Va. In the 1940 census he is listed once again at his parents’ house at 10 Chestnut Street in Plymouth. Working as a chauffeur, he and Ruth had Helen by this time. His WWII draft card indicates that he lived a 47 Russell Street in Plymouth. At that time, he worked for Oliver L. Edes at 23 Warren Ave in Plymouth.

Parker Lewis was born in 1919 to William H. and Ruby M. Lewis, both originally from Canada. In the 1920 Census, William H. worked as a porter for the post office while the family lived at 4 Wellington Ave, Somerville. By the 1930 Census, the family moved to 118 Harvard Ave in Medford where Parker’s father and brother Reginald worked as railroad porters. Parkers listed siblings include Catherine, Reginald, Earnest, William, Margaret, Frances, and James. The photograph of Parker shows him in front of the family’s home at 4 Wellington Ave with “Fudge,” his dog.

Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960) was a “neoromantic” composer from Clarksville, Tennessee. In his youth, he studied violin under William Marion Cook and later Joseph Douglass, Frederick Douglass’s grandson, at Howard University in Washington, D.C. After he attended the Oberlin Conservatory, White composed many “neoromantic” pieces as well as the opera Ouanga. At the time of the inscription on his photograph--1916-- he was working alongside R. Nathaniel Dett to establish the National Association of Negro Music Teachers. From 1916-1920, he also was the conductor of
Boston’s Victorian Chamber Orchestra. According to the inscription on his image, White was Elizabeth Lewis’s violin teacher.

**Anthony (Tony) Harris** went to Sunday School at Christ Church in 1900-- likely connecting him to Ethel Lewis. That same year he graduated from the Cambridge Manual Training School for Boys (CMTS) after graduating from the Washington grammar school in 1895. During his time at CMTS, Anthony-- popularly addressed as Tony-- was known for his skills at football. He later coached football at CMTS until ca. 1906. The 1908 City Directory cites Anthony as a waiter boarding at 73 Howard Street.

**Julia Harris** was possibly born ca. 1888. The 1921 City Directory mentions a Miss J.H. Harris who lived at 32 Linnaean Street. It is likely that she married H. Frederick Murray. A May 31, 1973 *Cambridge Chronicle* article refers to her as the Vice President of the Cantabrigia Club and references her death that year.

**Sue Harris**, according to the 1910 Census, was born ca. 1851. She married Benjamin Harris who was born ca. 1850; they lived in Cambridge Ward 5 (Mid Cambridge). Her connection to the Lewis family is likely due to the fact that she was originally from North Carolina.

**David (Dave) Houston** is the resident of “Houston’s Den” mentioned in this collection. He attended the Cambridge High and Latin School where he played baseball and football. He graduated from the high school in 1900, the same year as Anthony Harris; it is possible that they knew each other through sports. In 1908 the City Directory mentions a David M. who lived at 65 Washington Street and worked as a teamster.

The identity of **Bob Morris** is difficult to discern. There is a Robert Morris listed in the 1908 City Directory who was a student boarding at 62 Mt. Pleasant Street. A Richard Morris also listed that year was a laborer with a house at 68 Harvey Street. More promisingly, the 1920 Census mentions a Benjamin C. Morris born ca. 1874 who was married to Ida Morris. However, Ida Morris also had an uncle named Robert Morris, the first black lawyer in Boston.

**Ida Morris** could be one of two women. A July 26, 1879 *Cambridge Chronicle* article references the marriage of an Ida Morris to Charles E. Chapman. This Ida was the niece of a black lawyer in Boston, Robert Morris. Another article indicates that her daughter Harietta Chapman married Mingo Hawkins and that they lived in Roxbury. The other possible identity for Ida is Ida M. Morris. Information gathered from the 1920 Census explains that she was born ca. 1886 and she was married to Benham C. Morris-- possibly the Bob Morris in this collection. They lived in Malden but they were originally from Virginia and Canada.

**Thomas M. Thomas**, born in 1864 in Virginia, was a volunteer policeman in Cambridge during the 1890s. Around 1893 he also started working as a janitor at the Cambridge Public Library. In July of 1897 he married Julia Estella Jones Scott; they lived at 33 Parker Street. According to articles in the *Cambridge Chronicle* he enlarged his house in 1898 with a building permit #7203. He was identified as the architect of this project. Perhaps coincidentally he was a member of the black St. Philip’s Chapter of the Royal Architect Masons. Thomas M. Thomas retired from his janitorial job in 1920 and he died on July 28 of that year.
The identity of **Archie Thomas** is unknown, although it has been determined that he is not related to the Mrs. Archie Ladd Thomas (Ella Florence Haskell), a Harvard Law Library assistant living in Medford who was listed in the 1921 city directory.

**William Ashbie Hawkins** (1862-1941) was one of the first black lawyers in Baltimore. The son of Rev. Robert and Susie Hawkins, William A. married Ada M. McMechen in 1885 and they had two daughters, Aldina and Roberta. Hawkins graduated from the Centenary Biblical Institute in 1885. He attempted to get his law degree from the University of Maryland but was expelled in 1891 due to his race. He completed his degree in 1892 at Howard University. After his first wife died, Hawkins married Mary (Mamie) Sorrell in the 1920s and moved to Baltimore’s Govans neighborhood. It is possible that the **Nellie Sorrell** of this collection is a relation.

Elmer is possibly **William B. Elmer**. According to the 1921 city directory, he was a student at MIT who was living at 907 Mass Ave at the time.

**Ed Robinson** could be one of many men. In 1908 the city directory mentions an Edwin C. Robinson who was a clerk in Cambridge and lived in Brookline. The 1921 city directory lists an Edward F. Robinson, who was married to Helen M. and who worked as an operator in Somerville. It also lists Edward P. Robinson, a lather--a construction job--who lived at 28 Seven Pines Ave.

**Emille Bass** was born ca. 1896 in Missouri. According to the 1910 census, she lived at 8 Florence Street, Cambridge with her mother, Kate V. a dressmaker, her stepfather, Joseph E. Jacobs, a janitor, and her brother, Robert H. Bass. No other references have been found for the family.

No information or references have been found for these individuals: **Parker Laing, Nellie Sorrell, Henry Robbins, Lauretta, Kate, Samuel Lee, Leila Stubbs, “Vic” Blackwell, Nora Wingfield, Aury, John, Blanche, McKenny, E.C. Beuzard, Charles Vanderhoop, Francis, Emily, A.M., Lettie, Arthur, Mat, Ben, and Bee**.

References consulted:


Custodial History:

The albums depicted in the images were once owned by Jerome T. Lewis, George W. Lewis Jr.’s grandson. Jerome T. Lewis was the Assistant Director of the Cambridge Public Library. The personal connection between Jerome T. Lewis and Roberta Hankamer, Librarian of the Grand Lodge of Masons on Tremont St. Boston, is unknown.
Hankamer speculated that the albums were created by either Bess [Elizabeth E.] or Ethel Lewis, the daughters of George W. Lewis.

**Immediate Source of Acquisition:**

This collection is a part of a larger effort conducted by the CHC primarily in 1980-82 called the Cambridge Photo History Project. The Project was intended to bring together photographs of Cambridge places, people, and events taken before 1945. Residents and community members brought their personal collections to the CHC with the intention of guaranteeing the continuation of the information by making copies. It also had the dual purpose of easing residents’ concerns about retaining their control over their images by allowing the donor to keep the originals. Depending in part on the number of images in a donation and their relevance to the goals of the collection, reproductions were made on a copy stand using either 35mm black and white film or Polaroid 4” x 5” format Type 55 film. Contact prints were made from both formats, but the negatives are the closest representations of the original images. For best results scans should be made of the negatives, not of the contact prints.

**Existence and Location of Originals:**

Unknown. The albums were returned to Ms., Hankamer on July 30, 1980. Negatives and contact prints are on file at the Cambridge Historical Commission.

**Related Resource:**


See Lewis family and Lewisville segments of African American files in CHC people files.


For access to *The Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of William Lloyd Garrison* published by the Colored Citizens of Greater Boston and the Garrison Centenary Committee of the Suffrage League of Boston and Vicinity, 1906 please visit [https://books.google.com/books?id=P4cx4f9dHqUC&lpg=PA40&dq=%22ethel%20lewis%22%20baltimore&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=P4cx4f9dHqUC&lpg=PA40&dq=%22ethel%20lewis%22%20baltimore&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q&f=false)
Scope and Content:

This collection is organized by the formats in which the original photograph album was reproduced during the CHC Photo Project. Due to this unique recording method and the physical extent of the collection, no intellectual order has been placed on the records.

Three formats are present in this collection: copy images, contact sheets, and 35mm negatives. The copy images are enlarged images extracted from the contact sheets and therefore duplicates. The contact sheets were originally labelled numerically and half possess duplicate photographic content but are arranged in a different order within the contact sheet. The images on the negatives correspond to the content on the contact sheets.

The list of identified people and places in the Inventory is not a complete account of all the photographs present in the images. Many photographs are unlabeled and unidentifiable, so they have not been reflected in the listing.

System of Arrangement:

Note on Physical Access:

The contact sheets and copy images are located in the collection folder.

The negatives are located in the CHC negative storage.

Inventory:

Identified Copy Images (enlarged images from Contact Sheets)

L.M. Lewis, 1906
[theatrical production at 47 Parker], ca. 1905-1910
“Pa” George W. Lewis, ca. 1900-1910
Trusky’s [Trusty’s] Residence, 26 Parker St, ca. 1910-1920
Residence of T.M. Thomas [Thomas M. Thomas] [33 Parker St]
[47 Parker St], ca. 1905-1910
Aunt Lizzie [Elizabeth E.], ca. 1900-1920
George W. Lewis
Lewis Residence, 47 Parker St
Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway St
George and Nancy Lewis, Lewis Residence, 47 Parker St
St. Mark’s Picnic, Caledonia Grove [West Roxbury]
Ma Lewis, Pa Lewis, Nellie Sorrell, Anthony Harris, Benzina Reese, Henry Robbins, Ethel Lewis, Jerome Lewis
Contact Sheet #1 (corresponding negative #1122)

Photograph #20-21: Dad [George W. Lewis]
Photograph #24-25: [(right) George W. Lewis]

Contact Sheet #2 (corresponding negative #1123)

Photograph #9-10: Johnson Gate, Harvard University
Photograph #11-12: Houston’s Den
Photograph #13-14: G.C. Lewis [George Colman] [at 4 Wellington Ave]
Photograph #15-16: Ma Lewis, Pa Lewis, Nellie Sorrell, Anthony Harris, Benzina Reese, Henry Robbins, Ethel Lewis, Jerome Lewis
Photograph #17-18: (left) Emille Bass, (right) E.A. Lewis [Ethel Lewis]
Photograph #19-20: N.E. Lewis
Photograph #25-26: Ma Lewis
Photograph #27-28: (upper left) The College Girl
Photograph #29-30: (upper left) Pa Lewis, (upper middle) Kate, Sue [Harris], (bottom middle) Washington Elm, (bottom right): Andrew [Lewis]
Photograph #33-34: (upper left) 1913; (upper right) 1903

Contact Sheet #3 (corresponding negative #1124)

Photograph #4-5: Mrs. [Benzina Reese] Gray and Hermon [Herman Gray]
Photograph #8-9: (left) Lauretta and Ethel Lewis, (right) Ethel Lewis, 1907
Photograph #14-16: Alma [Lewis], Pa Lewis, Ma Lewis, 1907
Photograph #17-18: 1907
Photograph #23-24: Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Lee, 1908
Photograph #29-32: Birdie [Elizabeth E. Lewis?], 1908
Photograph #33-34: Andrew [Lewis], 1909
Photograph #35-36: Leila [Stubbs] and Andrew [Lewis], 1910
Photograph #37: (left) Vic Blackwell, Nora Wingfield, Bessie [Elizabeth E.] Lewis [Brooks], Leila Stubbs, 1910, (right) Maurice [Brooks], 1910

Contact Sheet #4 (corresponding negative #1125)

Photograph #8-9: “To Mrs. Bessie [Elizabeth E.] Lewis Brooks, from her friend and teacher, Clarence Cameron White, 1916”
Photograph #16-17: W.[William] Ashbie Hawkins

Contact Sheet #5 (corresponding negative #1126)

Photograph #3-4: “Lovingly, Clair, 1919,” “A.W. Warren, photographer”
Photograph #11-12: Lettie

Photograph #13-14: Arthur and Mat


Photograph #24-25: (left) Aury (upper middle) Ben, George, Aury, Bess [Elizabeth E.], (lower middle) Bess [Elizabeth E.] and Aury

Photograph #26-27: Aury and Bess [Elizabeth E.]

Photograph #28-29: (upper left) Unknown, (upper right) John, (lower left) Isaac [Logan], (lower right) Henry

Photograph #30-33: Parker [Lewis] and “Fudge” [at 4 Wellington Ave]

Photograph #34-35: (upper right) [William B.?] Elmer, Blanche, McKenny

Photograph #36-37: L.M. Lewis, 1906

Contact Sheet #6 (corresponding negative #1127)

Photograph #3-4: (left) Vic Blackwell, Nora Wingfield, Bessie [Elizabeth E.] Lewis [Brooks], Leila Stubbs, 1910, (right) Maurice [Brooks], 1910

Photograph #13-14: (left) Sue Harris, (right) E.C. Beuzard

Photograph #15-16: Ed Robinson

Photograph #17-18: Bob Morris

Photograph #19-20: Parker Laing

Photograph #21-22: (right) Charles Vanderhoop

Photograph #23-24: (left) Francis, Emily, Herman

Contact Sheet #7 (corresponding negative #1128)

Photograph #2-3: (bottom left) Bee

Photograph #4-5: The tennis players

Photograph #6-7: Archie Thomas

Contact Sheets #1A-7A (corresponding negatives #1129-1131, #1135-1137)

Duplicate content of contact sheets #1-7 but in exact album order and without enhanced images.

Return to CHC Collections home:
http://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/researchaids/archivalcollections