The African American presence in Maine dates from the United States early colonial period. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, strong African American communities in Portland, Bangor, and other areas struggled for prosperity, civil rights, and equality, and made important contributions to the culture and economy of the state. The University of Southern Maine Library has established and is developing a broad-based collection of manuscripts, printed works, visual material, audio material, and artifacts representing the full historical and cultural record of the African American experience in Maine and its connections with the experience of African Americans regionally and nationally. There are no other collections of extensive breadth or depth that reflect the presence of this community.

The mission of the African American Collection of Maine is to provide a repository for the collection and preservation of a variety of records documenting Maine's African Americans; to emphasize the importance of such material; to organize and catalog this material making it available to scholars, teachers, students of all ages, and the general public; to sponsor educational programs and exhibitions within and beyond the University of Southern Maine about Maine's African American community and history; to generate scholarship; and, to work with other institutions in reaching the above goals.

The African American Collection of Maine was inspired by Gerald E. Talbot. Talbot was the first African American elected to the Maine State Legislature and his family has been in Maine since the mid-eighteenth century. As Talbot explained in April 1994:

“It is because of my long involvement in civil rights in Maine and New England and my deep interest and involvement in my black culture and history, that I have collected and preserved pieces of that black history, nationally and locally, for others to see and learn from.”

Another inspiration came from the documentary, Anchor of the Soul, that focused attention on the struggle to maintain a black community in New England. Shoshana Hoose, who was largely responsible for researching and making the documentary, and Gerald E. Talbot began meeting with University of Southern Maine officials in 1994. They wanted to build a collection that would document and preserve African American culture and history. In 1995 Talbot donated his collection to the University and it became the basis of the African American Collection of Maine. Not surprisingly, Talbot's gift was followed by material donated by Anchor of the Soul filmmakers Hoose and Karin Osseo.

In 1997 the University hired a faculty scholar to interpret the collection and to encourage research based on the Collection. Also in that year, the University, as part of its commitment to diversity, established the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine. One of its goals is to collect and preserve primary and secondary research materials on the experience of diverse groups in Maine. It was only natural that the African American Collection of Maine become one of the four major collections of the new Center.

The African American Collection of Maine is now administered by the University Library's Special Collections and is open to the public.
The Collection

The Collection contains a variety of print, manuscript, and three-dimensional materials. The majority of the collections are paper-based, including manuscripts, books, magazines, posters, and photographs; additionally, there is a significant collection of artifacts. In both the Gerald F. Talbot Collection and Lee Forest Collection there are objects from nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular culture, such as political and social buttons, cookie jars, and statues, which document images and perceptions of African Americans. There are also audio-visual materials, mostly created in the 1990s. One of the richest resources are photographs in the Talbot Collection, which document African Americans in Maine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much of the collection is geographically linked to Maine, but there are many items that are national in scope.

The first collections that came into the Collection are (in the order of acquisition):

**Gerald F. Talbot Collection**
ca. 1800s - 1990s
ca. 170 linear feet
The collection contains books, serials, posters, artifacts, and photographs documenting African Americans in the United States, with an emphasis on Maine. The collection was assembled by Gerald F. Talbot, the first African American to be elected to the Maine State Legislature, and it includes his personal papers, records of his term in the Maine House of Representatives (1972-1978), and his work with the NAACP in Maine and the State Board of Education.

**Anchor of the Soul Collection**
ca. 1991-1992
ca. 7 linear feet
Material regarding a video production and exhibition, *Anchor of the Soul*, a history of Maine’s African American community.

**Frederick D. Williams Papers**
ca. 1 linear foot
Phonographs, records, and books.

**Harold F. Richardson Papers**
1939-1991
2.25 linear feet
Richardson was the second African American elected to public office in Maine. The papers consist of a scrapbook, documenting his many contributions to the Portland community, including serving on the Portland Water District Board, as well as photographs, and a certificate of membership in the Mt. Lebanon Masonic Lodge, dated 1949.
Visible Black History Archives
1996-2002
c. .25 linear feet
Published writings on African Americans in Maine by H. H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot.

Lee Forest Figurines
c. 1930s-50s
11 items
Kitchen canisters, in the shapes of Mammy and Tom.

N. T. Swezey's Son & Co. Tin Sign
ca. 1980s
Metal reproduction of sign advertising the Northwestern Consolidated Milling Company.

"Home Is Where I Make It" Oral History Collection
ca. 2001-2002
c. 3 linear feet
Transcripts and photographs from an oral history project to document African American community and activism in the greater Portland area.

Collection Development
Inquiries regarding donations to the Collection can be made by contacting the head of Special Collections, Susie R. Bock, 207-780-4269, bocks@usm.maine.edu
314 Forest Ave., PO Box 9301, Portland, ME 04104-9301.

Using the African American Collection
The Collection is open to the public and may be used by registering with a photo ID, such as a University ID or driver's license.

The Collection is located in Special Collections, 6th Floor of the Albert Brenner Glickman Family Library.

Special Collections is open by appointment, but this is subject to change. Please call 207-780-4275 or check the Web site for current information.
http://library.usm.maine.edu/specialcollections

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