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FAIRFIELD FOUR COLLECTION
1942-2000

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INTRODUCTION

The Fairfield Four are Nashville's most important community-based traditional black gospel group. The collection was loaned to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by Doug Seroff from his personal collection. After filming, the materials were returned to Mr. Seroff. Doug Seroff is a record collector and dealer who was instrumental in reuniting the Fairfield four in 1980, after approximately twenty years of inactivity, for a concert at Boutwell Auditorium in Birmingham, Alabama, on October 12, 1980.

The most significant portion of the collection consists of artifacts which Seroff purchased from Mrs. Essie Battle in 1988. Mrs. Battle is the widow of John Battle, an original member of the Fairfield Four and manager of the quartet until shortly before his death in 1947. Mrs. Battle had these personal effects of her late husband in a suitcase which she kept in her home for more than four decades. In addition to the items in this collection, the suitcase included old photographs, programs, and placards gathered from other gospel groups, who were contemporaries of the Fairfield Four.

This collection can be used for individual or scholarly use and individual copies of selected items may be made. However, where use may pose a potential copyright infringement, the user should obtain permission for use from the owner of the materials.

CONTENTS

Manuscripts and Documents

1. "Daily Suggester, 1947." This contains addresses of quartet singers and details of the Fairfield four's touring itinerary during 1947, dates and locations, the groups they performed with and promoters who booked them. (John Battle Collection)
2. Ring Binder. Contains unique documentation. Opens with a lengthy index of the Fairfield Four's active repertoire of songs, many with notations regarding composers. The next item is a catalog of the "By Laws of the Fairfield Four"; transcribed lyrics to some of the group's songs and several pages of 1940s newspapers clippings related to the Fairfield four, that include documentation of the "Colonial Quartet Radio Contest" that was the impetus for the group's popular national radio broadcasts. This notebook also contains the minutes of meetings of the Fairfield four in 1943 and 1944, and notes regarding financials. Loose pages include a two-page history of the quartet written by Essie Battle, ca. 1955, and a three-page handwritten history that was prepared by John Battle. (John Battle Collection)
3. Work Book. A faded blue folder consists of transcribed song lyrics and "readings" which were a popular part of early black community music programs. Toward then back of the notebook are original texts by John Battle, including one titled, " Dedicated to the Fairfield Four—Remembrance." Battle's last appearance with the Fairfield Four was in Birmingham, Alabama, on Thanksgiving Day in 1946. He died in April 1947. (John Battle Collection)

Photographs

1. Fairfield Four (4 x 6). This is the earliest known photo of the group dating from the mid-1930s (1932?). Identified on page 12 of the June 9, 1988, "Gospel Arts Day Nashville" booklet. (John Battle Collection)
2. Fairfield Four (5 x 7). The earliest photo of the group with Samuel McCrary, dating from the late 1930s. Identified on the inside back cover of 1988 "Gospel Arts Day" booklet. (John Battle Collection)
3. Male quartet (8 x 10). Quartet standing in a formal studio pose. John Battle is second from the right. In about 1940 John battle spent a year in Cleveland, Ohio. While there he sang with this gospel group, whose name has not been determined. (John Battle Collection)
4. A gospel program at Wheat Street Baptist Church in Atlanta. The Fairfield Four and the Reliable Jubilee singers of Atlanta are pictured at bottom right. (8 x 10) July 13, 1942. (John Battle Collection)

5. A gospel program at Sarah Allen Child Welfare Station in New Orleans, early 1940s. At the front of the auditorium are the Fairfield four and in front of them the Soproco spiritual singers of New Orleans. (8 x 10). (John Battle Collection)
6. Fairfield Four (8 x 10), 1949. Identified on page 16 of the 1988 "Gospel Arts Day" booklet. (John Battle Collection)
7. "The South's Famous Fairfield Four." (8 x 10) copy negative. Woodward's Studio, Detroit, ca. 1947-48. Top L to R: Rufus Carrethers; Willie Frank Lewis; Edward Thomas. Bottom: Samuel H. McCrary; James Hill; George Gracey.
8. Fairfield four (8 x 10) 1953. Identified on page 17 of "Gospel Arts Day," 1988 booklet.
9. The Skylarks (8 x 10). In 1950 James Hill, Edward Thomas, and Isaac Freeman broke away from Rev. Sam McCrary and the Fairfield four and organized a gospel quartet known as the Skylarks. They toured and recorded extensively through 1967.
10. Fairfield four (8 x 10) 1980. The group was reunited in 1980. They made their first public appearance at the "Jefferson County Quartet Reunion."
11. Joe Whittaker and James Hill, Birmingham, on the day prior to the Quartet Reunion by "Gospel Fritz."
12. Sam McCrary and Willie Love, Birmingham, on the day prior to the Quartet Reunion by "Gospel Fritz."
13. Isaac Freeman on stage at the "Jefferson County Quartet Reunion."
14. Fairfield Four (5 x 7) on stage at Baird Auditorium, Smithsonian Institution, November 20 or 21, 1981. L to R: Rev. Sam McCrary; Isaac Freeman; James Hill; Willie Love; Joe Whittaker.
15. Smithsonian Institution, November 20 or 21, 1981. L to R: Sam McCrary; Isaac Freeman; James Hill; Joe Whittaker; Willie Love.
16. Fairfield Four and Sensational Nightingales during a workshop at the Smithsonian Institution Quartet Weekend. L to R: Isaac Freeman; Joe Whittaker; James Hill; Sam McCrary; Willie Love; Portia Maultsby (moderator); Charles Johnson; Joe Wallace; bill Woodruff; Horace Thompson.
17. Wilson Waters and Isaac Freeman of the Fairfield Four following their performance at the 1988 New Orleans Jazz Fest. (5 x 7)

18. Fairfield Four (8 x 10 color promotional photo), ca. 1987. L to R: Wilson Waters; Isaac Freeman; Sam McCrary; W. L. Richardson; James Hill.
19. Fairfield Four (11 x 14). Top L to R: Joe Whittaker (guitarist); James Hill; Sam McCrary. Bottom: Willie Love; Isaac Freeman. Taken by Mark Gooch, Birmingham, October 11, 1980.

Promotional Materials

1. "The South's Famous Fairfield Four." (7 x 8 card) 1942.
2. "The Southernaires Female Quartet and The South's Famous Fairfield Four." (11 x 14 card) ca. 1942.
3. "Don't Drive Your Child Away," Willie Frank Lewis, ca. mid-1940s (5 x 7 card).
4. Program, "Fairfield Four Gospel Singers," six page fold-out, August 23, 1946.
5. "The South's Famous Fairfield Four of WLAC." (6 x 6 card) possibly 1946.
6. "Jefferson County Quartet Reunion, Birmingham City Auditorium, poster, October 12, 1980.
7. Brochure, "The Gospel Tradition, Carnegie Hall, February 16, 1985.
8. Fold-out, "Wheatland Festival Schedule, 1987.
9. Post card, Summer Lights 1991 review, The Nashville Bluegrass Band and The Fairfield Four.
10. Brochure, Keith Case & Associates, Nashville, Tennessee, n.d.

Booklets

1. "Birmingham Quartet Scrapbook: A Quartet Reunion in Jefferson County." Birmingham City Auditorium, October 12, 1980.
2. Smithsonian Performing Arts, Baird Auditorium, National Museum of Natural History, "Program In Black American Culture," 1981/82.
3. "8th Annual Tennessee Grassroots days," September 24-25, 1983, Centennial Park.
4. "Gospel Arts Day, Nashville: a Special Commemoration." Jubilee Hall, Fisk University, June 19, 1988.
5. The National Heritage Fellowships Awardees, 1989.

6. "Home of the Heroes." Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Traditional Gospel Quartets, Bessemer Civic Center Auditorium, September 30, 1990.

Newspaper Clippings

1983-1998

Funeral Programs

1. Brother Willie James Love, March 4, 1991
2. Reverend Samuel H. McCrary, March 11, 1991
3. Reverend W. L. Richardson, August 22, 1993; August 21, 1994
4. Walter James Settles, Sr., April 25, 1999
5. James Samuel Hill, July 11, 2000