Inventory of the
Walter N. Boags Papers, 1945 - 1980s
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Walter N. Boags Papers,
Dates: 1945 - 1980s
Abstract: From 1949 to the late 1970s, Walter N. Boags (1917-1997) owned and operated Boags Modern Arts Photography Studio, one of the few African American photography studios in Charleston, South Carolina. During the 1980s, Boags continued to operate as a freelance photographer.

The collection consists mostly of black-and-white and color negatives, with some prints and proofs, taken by Walter Boags from 1945 through the 1980s. Boags' work focused on African Americans, African American groups, and architecture related to African American education, worship, and business in the Charleston area. Studio portraits include portraits of individuals, school photographs, graduation cap-and-gown portraits. On-site and studio work features commercial and business sites, schools and churches, sororities and fraternities, civic organizations, music and dance groups, women's groups and social organizations. Event photography includes weddings as well as mourning and memorial images of the deceased. Copy work done by Boags includes negatives and prints produced of 19th and 20th century images, including one image by African American photographer Charles Macbeth. Business-related material includes legal work consisting of photographs from traffic accidents and injuries. Personal material includes data on the Hamilton family, school certificates, Boags' notes from mortuary science classes, and other materials.

Extent: 27.5 linear feet(30 archival boxes, 9 record cartons)
Repository: Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston
Call Number: AMN 1053
Language of Material: Material in English

Biographical Note

A native of Charleston, South Carolina, Walter N. Boags (1917-1997) graduated from Avery High School and Fisk University, served as military pilot, and studied mortuary science.

Boags left Charleston to attend photography school and returned in 1949, after which he opened a photography studio, Boags Modern Arts, at 32 Spring Street. Boags Modern Arts Photography was one of the few African American photography studios in the city. After about 30 years, Boags closed his studio, but continued to operate as a freelance photographer.

Walter Boags' work spanned nearly 40 years and consisted mainly of studio portraits, weddings, and high school graduation photos. He also photographed some commercial and business sites, fraternities, social groups, and public events, as well as mourning and memorial images of the deceased.
Collection Overview

The collection consists mostly of black-and-white and color negatives (with some prints and proofs) of portraits and other subjects taken by Boags from 1945 through the 1980s. Most images were originally housed in brown paper bags that contained varying amounts of information about the person who ordered the photos. Thus information for many images may not be the name of the subject but the name of the customer paying for the image. All these original labeled materials have been preserved and are housed with the associated negatives or positives. The collection is divided into several series.

Studio portraits are arranged alphabetically within the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Cap-and-gown portraits of high school graduates are also arranged alphabetically within the same decades. Weddings, listed alphabetical by the groom's last name, are arranged within the spans 1950-1969, the 1970s, and the 1980s. Mourning and memorial images of the deceased and images of schools, groups, businesses and commercial sites are listed in a name index available in the repository.

Schools include Avery Normal School, Bond-Wilson High School, Buist, Burke High School, Calvary School, Jenkins Orphanage, Greshem-Meggett School, Immaculate Conception School, Kings Highway Elementary School, Laing School, Mary Ford School, Liberty Hill Elementary School, Simonton School, Sol Legare, and others.

Sites and groups photographerd include The Blue and White Store, the Breech Tea Room, Central Baptist Church, Ebenezer AME Church, Ebony Beauty School, the Hotel James, Larimer School, the Lincoln Theater, the Marion Grill, Morris Brown AME Church, Mt. Zion Church, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, Purvis Drugs, Safety Cab Company, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Taylor's Bakery, and Your Flower Shop.

Groups photographed include sororities such as Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Businesses and professional associations include the Bakers Union, Charleston Funeral Directors, Palmetto Beauty School, and South Carolina Funeral Directors; civic organizations such as the American Legion, Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Civil servants like members of the Charleston Fire Department, Charleston Police Department, and Practical Nurses, are represented. Music and dance groups (some religiosly oriented) include the Fordham Gospel Singers, Gospel Singers, Highlettes, Louis Gaillard and His Royal Sultans, Metronome All Stars, the Modernettes, Rama Gama dancers, Sons of Grace, Southernaire, Starlight Singers, Voices of Praise. Church-related and religious groups are represented, including Charity Baptist Day Care, Deacon Baptist, Gethsemane Baptist, Plymouth Congregational Church, Hebron United Presbyterian, Greater Refuge of Christ Apostolic Guild, Greater St. Luke's AME Church, chapters 215 and 360 of the Order of the Eastern Star, Shiloh Church, St. Patrick's Catholic Church, St. Peter's AME Church, and Zion Olivet Church. Women's clubs include the Entre Nous Bridge Club, Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and the Phillis Wheatley Literary and Social Club. Other community groups include the Bears Athletic Club, Reid Home Center, and Shaw Community Center.

This series includes includes negatives and prints produced by the Boags Modern Arts Photography Studio based on 19th and 20th century images brought in by clients to be copied. Includse one image by African American photographer Charles Macbeth.

Business-related material includes legal work consisting of photographs from traffic accidents and injuries. It also includes forms, cancelled checks, and some promotional materials.

Personal material includes some data on the Hamilton family, Buist School certificates, materials on the Westchester Neighborhood Association, Boags' class notes from the Renouard School of Embalmers, and material on the Scipio Williams, Jr. American Legion Auxiliary.

Collection Arrangement

1. Portraits of Individuals, 1950s-1980s
2. School Photographs, 1947-1980s
3. Events and Sites: Weddings, Funerals, and Gatherings, 1949-1980s
5. Business-Related Material, 1950s-1980s
6. Personal Material, 1945-1980s

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

No restrictions.

Copyright Notice

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Subject Headings

African American fraternal organizations -- Photographs -- 20th century.
African American fraternal organizations -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
African American musicians -- Photographs -- 20th century.
African American musicians -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
African American photographers -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
African Americans -- South Carolina -- Charleston -- Portraits.
African Americans -- Portraits -- 20th century.
Black-and-white photographs.
Boags Modern Arts Photography Studio.
Charleston (S.C.) -- Social life and customs -- 20th century.
Church buildings -- South Carolina -- Charleston -- Photographs
Clothing and dress -- South Carolina -- Charleston -- 20th century.
Color photographs.
Death -- Pictorial Works.
Funeral rites and ceremonies -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
High schools -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
Mourning customs -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
Photographers -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
Photography -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
Portrait photography -- South Carolina -- Charleston.
Postmortem photography -- United States -- 20th century.
Traffic accidents -- South Carolina -- Charleston -- Photographs.
Weddings -- South Carolina -- Charleston -- Photographs.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Walter N. Boags Papers, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA.

Processing Information

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### 1. Portraits of Individuals, 1950s-1980s

This series includes studio portraits are arranged alphabetically within the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>1950s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Black-and-white 4-inches by 5-inches negatives arranged alphabetically by name of sitter or customer. Often with addresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-14</td>
<td>1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Unidentified Subjects, undated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. School Photographs, 1947-1980s

This series includes cap-and-gown portraits of high school graduates are also arranged alphabetically within the same decades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Events and Sites: Weddings, Funerals, and Gatherings, 1949-1980s

This series includes event photography and images of sites in Charleston, South Carolina. Weddings, listed alphabetically by the groom's last name, are arranged within the spans 1950-1969, the 1970s, and the 1980s. Mourning and memorial images of the deceased and images of schools, groups, businesses and commercial sites are listed in a name index available in the repository.

- **Box 19** Weddings and Receptions: 1950-1969
  - Black-and-white and color negatives arranged alphabetically by groom's name.

- **Box 20-23** Weddings and Receptions: 1970s
  - Color negatives arranged alphabetically by groom's name.

- **Box 24** Weddings and Receptions: 1980s
  - Color negatives arranged alphabetically by groom's name.

- **Box 25** Funerals: Mourning and Memorial Portraits, 1950-1983
  - Black-and-white negatives of identified and unidentified subjects. List of deceased and funeral homes available for some.

- **Box 26** Other Gatherings: 1949-1980s
  - Black-and-white and color negatives of groups at schools, churches, fraternal and social events. A name index of groups available.

- **Box 27** Architectural Sites, 1950-1975
  - Includes negatives of commercial buildings, businesses, churches, and hotels. A name index is available.

- **Box 28** Architectural Sites, 1950s
  - Severely deteriorated negatives of architectural sites, including buildings, businesses, churches, and hotels. Contains some memorial images. A name index is available.


This series includes negatives and prints produced by the Boags Modern Arts Photography Studio based on 19th and 20th century images brought in by clients to be copied. Include one image by African American photographer Charles Macbeth.
### Box 32
**Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Photographs, 1960-1982**

Copied by Boags, with some identification as to clients; some unidentified. With some copy negatives and prints. Image from Atlantic Beach, of possibly the mosquito fleet, and one by Charles Macbeth.

### Box 33
**Photographs Copied by Boags, 1970-1984**

Includes copy prints and negatives. Some identification by client name. Black-and-white and color.

### Box 34
**Legal Cases, undated**

Includes photos taken for showing auto accidents and injuries. Often filed by attorney name. Black-and-white and color; positives and negatives.

### 5. Business-Related Material, 1950s-1980s

This series includes legal work consisting of photographs from traffic accidents and injuries, forms, cancelled checks, and some promotional materials for the Boags Modern Arts Photography Studio.

### Box 38
**Administrative Materials, 1950s-1970s**

Includes order forms; promotional materials; cancelled business checks and professional certificates.

### Box 38
**Photography Props, 1950s-1980s**

Includes graduation cap and pair of earrings.

### Box B
**Chalk Board, undated**

To be filled in and photographed at beginning of a project to identify subject.

### 6. Personal Material, 1945-1980s

This series includes some data on the Hamilton family, Buist School certificates, materials on the Westchester Neighborhood Association, Boags' class notes from the Renouard School of Embalmers, and material on the Scipio Williams, Jr. American Legion Auxiliary.

### Box 39
**Miscellaneous Items, 1945-1980s**

Includes correspondence, ephemera, data regarding the Hamilton family and Buist School; information on the Westchester Neighborhood Association; 1945 notes taken at Renouard Training School for Embalmers; and materials from the American Legion Scipio Williams, Jr. Auxiliary in Charleston, South Carolina.