Inventory of the

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Humane and Friendly Society,


Creator: Humane and Friendly Society.

Abstract: The Humane and Friendly Society was a benevolent society of free African American men in Charleston, South Carolina. The Society served as a way to provide for widows, orphaned children, a burial place for its members, and it also arranged apprenticeships and educational opportunities for African American men.

The collection consists of administrative materials of the Humane and Friendly Society including meeting minutes, correspondence, and membership lists. Topics of discussion include raising membership dues, care of the graveyard, and the rules of being a member. The record journal notes who paid dues, how long they have been a member of the Society, and where members are buried in Charleston. The plot records include completed and blank application forms.

Extent: .25 linear feet (1 archival box)

Repository: Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston

Call Number: AMN 1114

Language of Material: Material in English

Historical Note

The Humane and Friendly Society was established by free Blacks in Charleston, South Carolina in 1802 to support sick individuals and to aid their families; to provide a place for burial, and to help widows. In addition, they sometimes arranged for apprenticeships for African American males and paid for the education of orphaned children. The society also promoted a sense of community, yet some found the society and others like it to be elitist since one had to pay dues to be a member. The organization was one of nine burial and fraternal societies such as Brown Fellowship Society (1790); and preceded the Friendly Union Society (1913); Brotherly Association (1852); Monrovia Society (1856); Unity and Friendship Society (1871); Reserve Fellowship (1874); Lewis Christian Society; and Racker Hill Cemetery (aka Bright Light) (1890s). Other names for these organizations include bury leagues, mutual benefit societies, fraternal orders, and burial associations.

The Society established a cemetery for their members in 1843 at the Magnolia Complex (aka Magnolia Cemetery) in Charleston, South Carolina. Burial societies like the Humane and Friendly Society were necessary because societal laws prohibited the burial of African Americans in the same cemetery as Whites. Thus, Whites in Charleston supported the creation of these societies to maintain societal norms, nevertheless, the societies evolved to serve the needs of the African American community.

According to the 1913 Rules of the Humane and Friendly Society, the administrative officers of the organization included a President, a Vice-President, a Treasurer, and a Secretary.
After emancipation in 1865, membership in burial societies like the Humane and Friendly Society decreased because African American churches took on the responsibilities once held by the societies. In 1966, members of the Society held a meeting to discuss making changes to the bylaws, increasing membership dues, and the upkeep of the Humane and Friendly Society cemetery.

As of 2010, John Dash serves as president of the Society.

SOURCES: Avery Research Center vertical file folders: Burial Practices and Cemeteries

Collection Overview

The collection contains correspondence, 1965-1966 meeting minutes, membership applications, plot applications, membership rolls, due collections, interment information, occupied plot notices, and the bylaws of the Humane and Friendly Society. Administrative materials include the bylaws of the society and correspondence to members about bylaw and constitutional changes. Collection and interment records date from 1934 to 1965 and contain information about the amount of dues, the length of membership to the society, notations about the interments of members and family of members. Plot records includes the blank forms used by members to apply for plots in the Humane and Friendly Society and completed forms that note the plot number, the society members' name, and who has been buried on the plot.

Collection Arrangement

2. Collection and Interment Records, 1934-1965
3. Plot Records, 1934-1965

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

No restrictions.

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Subject Headings

African American cemeteries--South Carolina.

African American fraternal organizations.

African Americans--South Carolina--Charleston--Societies, etc.

Fraternal organizations--South Carolina--Charleston.
Burial records--South Carolina--Charleston.
Burial insurance--United States.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Humane and Friendly Society, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA.

Processing Information

Processed by Aaisha Haykal, 09,2011

Encoded by Aaisha Haykal, 09,2011
Detailed Description of the Collection


   Includes material relating to organizational structure of the organization as well as form letters, lists of members and lot holders and meeting minutes regarding constitutional and bylaw changes.

   Box 1 Folder 1    Rules of Humane and Friendly Society (1913)
   Box 1 Folder 2    Constitutional and Bylaw Changes, 1965-1966
   Box 1 Folder 3    Meeting Minutes, 1965
   Box 1 Folder 4    Correspondence, 1965-1981
   Box 1 Folder 5    Members and lot holders, 1965

2. Collection and Interment Records, 1934-1965

   The journal contains a list of member and dues collected from them as well as and a list of interment information for deceased members of the Society. Information found in the interment records comprises of name, age, place of death, date of death, burial location, undertaker and/or funeral home name, skin color, and sex.

   Box 1 Folder 6    Journal, 1934-1965

3. Plot Records, 1934-1965

   Includes blank and completed application forms for plots. Completed forms note what plot numbers/locations have been filled and who is buried in the plot.

   Box 1 Folder 7    Application for Plots
   Box 1 Folder 8    Occupied Plots