

The Vera White Collection

A Guide to the Material in the Library of
The Rochester Museum and Science Center

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Provenance

Vera White personally collected the majority of the items that are currently part of the Vera White Collection here at the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Some of the items currently part of the collection were added after Vera White's death by her power of attorney and close personal friend Mr. Robert L. Fitch. Other items were added to the collection during the arrangement process by Rochester Museum and Science Center staff and volunteers. Upon her death in 2001 the items which were apart of the original collection were removed from Vera White's residence at the Rochester Friendly Home and transported into the custody of Mr. Robert L. Fitch. On August 26, 2004 Mr. Robert L. Fitch contacted by mail the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Chief Curator in hopes that the museum might be willing to accept the collection into its archives and establish both intellectual and administrative control. One box and two folders were delivered to the Museum where staff was able to compile preliminary information about the scope and content of the collection. No arrangement of the collection was attempted until the deed of gift was signed and the collection was accepted by the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Accessions Committee.

In the fall of 2005 staff and volunteers begin arranging the collection by identifying the general content (Scope & Content), providing detailed information (Series Descriptions), assigning the collection a location on the repository shelves, and creating a finding aid and MARC record in OCLC's World Cat to provide reference services to the patrons. Careful consideration was taken when deciding how to arrange and preserve the materials in the collection to make them accessible to the public.

Biography

Vera Octavia White was born Vera Octavia Pearson in Icy Sink, Kentucky May 12, 1919 to Nancy Pearson and Will White. She was the youngest of seven children and the granddaughter of Reverend Nathan and Millie Pierson¹ who were both former slaves. At a very young age Will White, Vera's father, passed away leaving Nancy a single mother to raise seven children. Despite her poor upbringing Vera's family, especially her grandparents Nathan and Millie, were very instrumental in convincing Vera of the importance of a proper education. "Both great grandparents were slaves and told us each of many stories of slavery. They encouraged me to get an education and help others. They encouraged me to read the autobiography Booker T. Washington".² One of Vera's fondest childhood memories was of the family conferences they had while sitting around the fireplace at night.

After graduating from State Street High School with honors Vera applied and was accepted into the Sociology and Economics program at Kentucky State College³. While attending Kentucky State College Vera met and became friends with future author, presidential consultant, Urban League president, and civil rights activist Whitney Young. Vera was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority and on June 10, 1941 Vera graduated from Kentucky State College with a B.A. in Sociology and Economics. It was while attending College that Vera meet fellow student and future husband Eugene William White. Vera and Eugene moved to Rochester, New York shortly after their wedding in 1941.

After coming to Rochester Vera and Eugene moved into a predominantly white neighborhood in Irondequoit were they became the victims of racial discrimination. Because of this experience and experiences like this Vera would become active in the fight to end housing discrimination. From 1942 to 1944 Vera worked at the Fiscal Branch of the Rochester Ordnance auditing and processing accounts for businesses like Eastman Kodak, General Railway Signal, and Commercial Controls. Vera attended the Rochester Business Institute from 1943 to 1944. In 1949 Vera was hired by the Monroe County Department of Social Services first as a caseworker in the inner city and then as an agency supervisor where she supervised units which varied in size from six to sixteen workers, assigned cases, held in-service training programs and weekly conferences with staff, supervised field work for college students, was responsible for the complete operation of one of the satellite offices, and was part of the staff development program. Vera was the first African-American adoption worker in Monroe County and she focused on increasing the number of foster homes by recruiting more African-American adoptive parents. Vera's career with the Monroe County Department of Social Services spanned

¹ The spelling of the surname Pierson was changed to Pearson between 1846 and 1919.

² Quote taken from Untitled Personal History Document found in Series IV

³ Kentucky State College changed its name to Kentucky State University in the mid 1970's

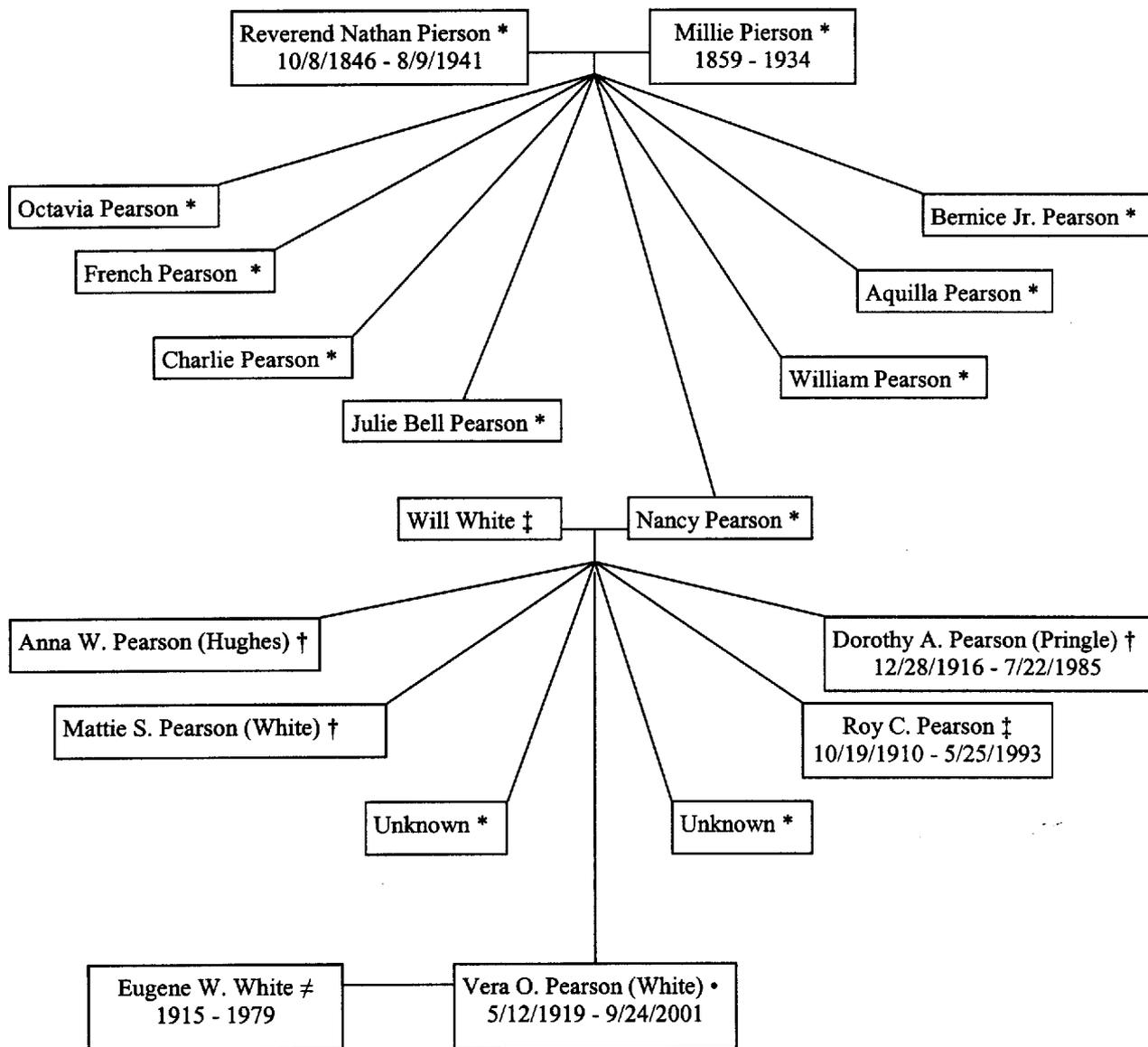
twenty-five years. Vera took early retirement from the Monroe County Department of Social Services due to on the job stress of heavy case loads. Vera later admitted that she wished she had not taken an early retirement because she was not ready to be retired. From January 1975 to November 1975 Vera worked at the Rochester Methodist Home and was instrumental in setting up the Home's new Social Services Department. Vera resigned from her position at the Methodist Home due to a lack of on-the-job satisfaction and in December 1975 Vera joined the staff of the Hillside Children's Center where she was assigned to the Family Work Department and Day Treatment Program. In 1976 she applied and was transferred to the Adoption Department. Vera worked for Hillside Children's Center for five years.

Besides having a successful career as a social worker, Vera volunteered with several organizations, served on the board of many committees, and was an active civil rights activist. According to a close personal friend of Vera's, Mr. Robert Fitch, Vera was able to help calm the seas between blacks and whites here in Rochester during the 1960's race riots. In 1965 Vera was nominated to the first board of directors for the newly established Rochester chapter of the National Urban League, the organization for which her friend Whitney Young was the president. Besides her involvement in the Urban League, Vera served on the boards of the Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley, Habitat for Humanity, Genesee Region Home Care Association, and the Genesee Region Home Care Hospice. Vera volunteered for the YWCA and for the American Red Cross as a member of the Rochester Red Cross Retirement Volunteers program. Her photograph was featured on an informational pamphlet entitled "What Are You Doing This Week?" which was dedicated to spreading the word about the Red Cross's Retired Volunteers program. Vera traveled to Kentucky October 9, 1980 to accept the Presidents Giving Club plaque from Kentucky State University's president Dr. W.A. Butts. The Plaque was in recognition of Vera and Eugene's support of growth and development at Kentucky State University. In 1988, in recognition of her many years of community service, Vera was presented with the 1987-1988 Community Leadership Award by the Urban League of Rochester for being a "pioneer in community action" and on October 14, 1992 Vera received the Special Mission Recognition Award given by the United Methodist Women at the Women's Division General Board of Global Ministries Western New York Conference.

Vera was a religious woman who attended service regularly at the Asbury First United Methodist Church on East Avenue in Rochester. According to a close personal friend, Vera and her husband Eugene were the first African-American members to join the parish at the Asbury First United Methodist Church in the early 1950's. Vera was an active member of the Church and as such was involved in programs like the Stephen Ministries, a program in which members of the parish who have been designated are allowed to serve as honorary ministers to help meet the needs of the parish

According to Mrs. Doris Gerst, Vera had several hobbies later in life. Vera loved to garden, take walks, take photographs, and travel the world. After the death of her husband Eugene in the late 1970's Vera spent most of the next decade traveling around

Lineage of Vera Octavia White



* White, Earle C. The First Pierson Family Reunion. P. 5. June 11, 1988.

† In Loving Memory of Mrs. Dorothy A. Pringle. Cantrell Funeral Home. July 26, 1985. Detroit, MI.

‡ In Loving Memory of Mr. Roy C. Pearson. Burnam and Son Mortuary. May 29, 1993. Bowling Green, KY.

• Goodman, James. (Nov. 24, 2001). Mrs. Vera White, former social worker, dies at 82. Rochester Democrat & Chronicle.

≠ Service in Memory of Eugene White Wednesday, February 28, 1979 four o'clock

the world. From 1980 to 1990 Vera traveled to Germany, India, China, Russia, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Nova Scotia, Israel, the Caribbean, and Alaska. Even in her mid-seventies Vera wanted to stay active. In the mid-1990's Vera and her associate Betty Perkins-Carpenter lead exercise classes for seniors in the Senior Health & Fitness Center at Valley Manor Apartments. A personal interview with Vera was featured in the January 1988 edition of Upstate Magazine, a publication distributed with the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle. In the article Vera stated that her biggest pet peeve was tardiness and she felt that when it came to being on time no one was better at it than she was. If she could have lived anywhere in the world besides Rochester Vera would have chosen Boston because she loved both the city and its culture. Vera's favorite junk food was any kind of sweet and on Saturday nights she would go to the movie theater to catch the newest film. According to Vera her proudest achievement was being able to use her education and to be herself. The best advice she ever received was to believe that you can attain your goals if you really want to. When talking about Vera, Mr. Robert L. Fitch who looked after her later in her life, described her as a regal woman who always dressed well and had a genuine concern for the wellbeing of children. Doris Gerst another close personal friend of Vera's who met Vera shortly after moving to the city of Rochester in the 1950's described her as being diligent, hard working, well organized, and a wonderful entertainer⁴.

Vera Octavia White passed away September 24, 2001 at age 82. She was survived by several nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews but no close living relatives. Major William B. Johnson of Rochester, a fellow Urban League member and friend of Vera's, spoke at her memorial service at the Asbury First United Methodist Church.

⁴ Information provided by interviews with Robert L. Fitch and Doris Gerst. See *Appendix* for transcriptions of both interviews.

Scope and Content

The Vera White collection is a small collection containing the personal records and documents, photographs, artifacts, and print items of and about Vera Octavia White, one of Rochester's most active and influential community members during the Twentieth century. A native of Kentucky, Vera relocated with her husband Eugene William White to Rochester, N.Y. to pursue employment opportunities. While in Rochester Vera became an active member in the community serving on the boards of many local organizations, volunteering, and working as a social worker and adoption agent in and around the city. Up until her death in 2001 Vera stayed active traveling the world, participating in senior citizen activities, volunteering for local organizations, and participating in activities at the Asbury First United Methodist Church.

The collection which was donated to the archives of the Rochester Museum and Science Center in 2004 contains a wide variety of documents. Newspaper articles, exhibition pamphlets, funerary programs, term reports, resumes, correspondences, event programs, photographs, diplomas, manuscripts, informational pamphlets, certificates, and awards are the types of items which make up the bulk of the collection. Items within the collection date as far back as 1937 and as recent as 2001.

Most of the items in the collection have been organized into acid-free folders by series and placed inside archive quality acid-free boxes. Some items such as Kentucky Thorobred 1941 Commencement Edition Newspaper and the Presbyterian Residence Center Corporation's Senior Living Today article featuring Vera have been housed separately from the rest of the collection in oversized boxes due to size. Newspaper articles collected by the archive's staff after Vera's death such as the *Time Union's* March 15, 1965 article and the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle's* March 16, 1965 article which reported the 1965 Rochester Urban League board of directors nominations and *Upstate Magazine's* January 3, 1988 interview with Vera have been placed in the Library's Vera O. White vertical file.

Between 1980 and 1989 Vera spent most of her time traveling around the world, volunteering for local organizations and attending awards ceremonies. The largest number of documents within the collection date back to this period of time. Many of the items (awards, correspondence from politicians and county executives, photographs, family documents, and newspaper articles) depict the period in Vera's life when she received the most recognition for the contributions she made to Rochester and her home state of Kentucky.

The second largest number of items were collected between 1937 and 1941 when Vera was living in Kentucky and attending Kentucky State College. Besides the term reports that date back to all four years that she attended KSC, many of the other items such as diplomas, commencement invitations, commencement programs, and student newspaper articles, document Vera's life as a student.

The third largest collection of items accumulated within the decade between 1991 and 2001 and contains items like awards, certificates, biographical documents, event invitations, newspaper articles, and manuscripts pertaining to her work with the United Methodist Women, her status as Alumni of the University of Buffalo, and her passing in 2001.

Items like her masters degree, resumes, social work certification documents, and employment history manuscripts which accumulated during the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's map out the geography of Vera's career in social work beginning with her education and ending with her retirement from the field.

Series I: Correspondence Description:

This series contains an abundance of incoming correspondence letters addressed to Vera White from friends, relatives, and associates. The information contained in these letters is of both a personal and professional nature. The contributions made to this series originate from local politicians such as Kevin B. Murry and Thomas R. Frey, University at Buffalo professionals Benjamin H. Lyndon and Sandra L. Bunkley, Vera's nephew James Gallwey, and a professional acquaintance of Vera's, Carol S. O'Connor. Many of these individuals were writing to Mrs. White in reference to her involvement in community activities and the local honors she received. Other correspondence pertains to the Urban League Community Leadership Award, the Monroe County Senior Games, the UB Alumni Program and Niles Carpenter Scholarship Alumni Award, and family affairs.

Series I: Correspondence

Incoming

Box 1	Folder	1	Letter of Congratulations #1 Letter of Congratulations #2 Letter of Congratulations #3
		2	Letter of Commendation #1
		3	UB Letter of invitation #1 UB Letter of Congratulations #1
		4	Personal Letter #1

Series II: Diploma Description:

This series contains the bachelors' degree in Economics and Sociology earned by Vera O. Pearson and Eugene W. White while attending Kentucky State University from 1937 to 1941. Vera also earned a master degree in social work from the State University of New York at Buffalo which is currently being housed in the History Department of the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Access to the diploma is available upon request.

Series II: Diplomas

Box 1	Folder	5	Diploma #1
			Diploma #2

Series III: Ephemera Description:

The following series consists of various ephemera or miscellaneous printed and published material collect by Vera White throughout her life. The earliest item contained in this series is the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Exhibition pamphlet which was distributed by the Rochester Museum and Science Center in September of 1942. There are various event invitations, programs, and informational pamphlets such as a Kentucky State College Commencement invitation, the 15th annual dinner for Urban League of Rochester program, the business cards for the president and executive director of the Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley and the American Red Cross retired volunteer program information pamphlet. Some of the documents are of a particularly personal nature. There are two copies of the first annual Pierson family reunion which took place in June, 1988 as well as a small collection of funeral programs from the funerals of Vera's sister, brother, husband, and nephew.

Series III: Ephemera

Box 1	Folder	6	Kentucky State College Commencement Invitation #1
	Folder	7	Urban League of Rochester Event Program #1
	Folder	8	The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Exhibition Pamphlet #1
	Folder	9	Pierson Family Reunion Program #1 Pierson Family Reunion Program #2
	Folder	10	American Red Cross Volunteer Program Pamphlet #1 Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley Business Card #1 Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley Business Card #2
	Folder	11	Eugene White Funeral Program Mrs. Dorothy A. Pringle Funeral Program Mr. Raymond L. Britt Funeral Program Raymond Louis Britt Funeral Program Mr. Roy C. Pearson Funeral Program Mr. Roy C. Pearson Funeral Program

Series IV: Manuscripts Description:

Series IV consists of the unpublished, hand written, and typed personal papers of Vera O. White. The first folder in the series houses *Resume #1, #2, and #3*. These documents are the rough and final drafts of the resumes created by Vera at age 58 and 78. The second folder in the series consists of handwritten lists. *List of Trips & People* documents the trips taken by Vera to fourteen different destinations between 1980 and 1990 and the first names of six people including Mrs. White. The relationship of the people on the list to Vera is unknown. The second list contained in the second folder also entitled the *List of Friends and Family*, was written by Robert L. Fitch on yellow notebook paper and consists of the names, addresses, and telephone numbers for both personal and professional acquaintances of Vera. The third and final folder in this series consists of three documents relating to Vera's personal and professional history. The first document, the *Untitled Personal History Document*, features a paragraph describing Vera's childhood and education in Icy Sink Kentucky as well as six items of information regarding people, places, and events related to Vera's history. The *Employment History Document* was handwritten by Vera and describes her employment history in the field of Social Work from January 20, 1975 to June 11, 1976. The final document in this folder, the *Typed Mini-Biography*, consists of a one page typed mini biography of Vera O. White. This document includes the names of friends, family, places, and employers, significant dates and events, and honors received throughout Vera's life.

Series IV: Manuscripts

Box 1	Folder	12	Resume #1 Resume #2 Resume #3
		13	List of Trips & People List of Friends and Family
		14	Untitled Personal History Document Employment History Document Typed Mini-Biography

Series V: Newspaper Clippings and Photocopied Articles Description:

Series V is comprised of published articles and photographs which document Vera's involvement in organizations in and around Rochester as well as in her home state of Kentucky. For reasons such as size and time of acquisition some important items have been removed from this part of the collection to be housed in more appropriate areas such as the Library's vertical file and oversized folders. For information on these items please consult the Scope & Content and Oversized Items sections of the finding aid. Many of the articles briefly discuss Vera's involvement in the Rochester chapter of the Urban League. Folders 15 and 16 contain the articles entitled *Urban League Honors Mitchell* and *Community Events* which announce Vera's acceptance of the Urban League's Community Leadership Award in 1988. Folder 17 contains a photograph from a January 1992 edition of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle which recognized Vera as a recipient of the United Methodist Women's Special Mission Recognition Award.

Series V: Newspaper Clippings and Photocopied Articles

Box 1	Folder	15	Newspaper Article #1
		16	Excerpt from About...Time Newsletter
		17	Photocopied Newspaper Photo and Caption 1992 Photocopied Newspaper Obituary 2001
		18	College Newspaper 1941 #1 and accompanying note (see also Oversize Box #1, Folder 1 and 1A)
		19	Excerpt from the Senior Living Today Newsletter (see also Oversized Box #1, Folder 2)

Series VI: Photographs Description:

The following series contains photographs taken of Vera, her family, and associates throughout her life. Much of the information concerning the photographs such as photographer, place, and date are unknown. There are two black and white photographs contained in this series. The first black and white photo which is contained in folder 20 depicts Vera at a young age and has been autographed and addressed to Vera in the top left corner from a woman named Mary whose identity is unknown. The second black and white photograph, dated October 9, 1980, in folder 25 depicts Vera receiving the Presidents Giving Club plaque by Kentucky State University's president Dr. W.A. Butts. Color photographs in folders 22, 23, and 24 were previously housed in a manila folder inscribed by Vera as "Good pictures of Eugene and Me- These were our last pictures made before his death" and folder 21 contains a color portrait of Vera and Eugene W. White from later in life.

Series VI: Photographs

Box 1	Folder	20	Photograph of Vera O. Pearson/Pierson
		21	Photograph of Vera O. White and Eugene W. White from the shoulders up
		22	Photograph of Vera O. White and Eugene W. White in chair
		23	Photograph of Vera O. White
		24	Photograph of Eugene W. White
		25	Photograph of Vera O. White and Dr. W.A. Butts

Series VII: Term Reports Description:

Series VII contains Vera's term reports dated between 1937 and 1940 which were collected while she attended Kentucky State College and earned a bachelor in Sociology and Economics.

Series VII: Term Reports

Box 1	Folder	26	Vera Pearson's term report for 1937-38 first semester Vera Pearson's term report 1937-38 second semester Vera Pearson's term report 1938-39 first semester Vera Pearson's term report 1938-39 second semester Vera Pearson's term report 1939 first semester Vera Pearson's term report 1940 first semester Vera Pearson's term report 1940 summer school
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Series VIII: Honors Description

This series consists of a small collection of personal and professional awards given to Vera throughout her life. Folder 27 contains the award given to Vera at the Western New York Conference in October, 1992 by the United Methodist Women which recognized Vera's continued participation in the organization and volunteerism.

Series VIII: Honors

Box 1	Folder	27	Special Mission Recognition Award
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Oversized: Oversized Description:

The Oversized series consists of items which because of size could not be housed with smaller items in the collection. The item in folder 1 is the 1941 Commencement edition of Kentucky State College's student newspaper called the Kentucky Thorobred. This edition of the Kentucky Thorobred features a photograph, caption, and accompanying article featuring Kentucky State College's graduates of 1941. The Photograph of the graduates is of particular importance because Vera is seated to the right of future author, presidential consultant, Urban League president, civil rights activist and friend Whitney Young. Page 4 of the Kentucky Thorobred features a photograph, caption, and article about the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority of which Vera was a member. The handwritten note housed in folder 1A was previously attached to the 1941 commencement edition of the Kentucky Thorobred and gives details concerning the photograph of Vera and Whitney Young. Folder 2 consists of two pages from the Presbyterian Residence Center Corporation's Senior Living Today newsletter. This summer 1993 edition of Senior Living Today features an article *Movement is the key to quality of life* and an accompanying photograph of Vera and her associate who ran exercise classes for seniors at the Valley Manor Apartments.

Oversized:

Box 1	Folder 1	Newspaper Clippings and Photocopied Articles- Kentucky State College 1941 Commencement Newspaper
	Folder 1A	Handwritten note
	Folder 2	Newspaper Clippings and Photocopied Articles- Excerpt from the PRCC Senior Living Today Newsletter

Artifacts in the History Department

1. Framed Biennial Registration Certificate
This document certifies that Vera O White's qualifications for professional practice in the area of Social Work were approved by The University of the State of New York State Education Department on February 29, 1979
2. Framed Certificate
Award given by the National Association of Social Workers certifying that Vera O. White met the requirements prescribed by the National Association of Social Workers, was a member of the N.A.S.W., and was certified as a professional social worker
3. Kentucky State University President's Club Plaque
Presented to Mr. and Mrs. Eugene W. White in grateful appreciation of their support of the growth and development of the Kentucky State University by the President of KSU, Dr. W. A. Butts on October 20, 1980
4. Framed Diploma
Diploma given to Vera P. White from the Council of the University of Buffalo upon receiving a Master degree in Social Service June 7, 1959
5. Copy of a full-color photograph of Mrs. Vera O. White
Photograph taken by a photographer for the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle. The image appeared above an article about Vera O. White in an issue of the 1985 Democrat & Chronicle
6. Framed photograph of Mr. Eugene W. White and Mrs. Vera O. White
7. Framed photograph of Mr. Eugene W. White

Appendix

Page 19-22	Interview with Robert L. Fitch September 28, 2005
Page 23-26	Interview with Doris Gerst September 23, 2005