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Hartford Public Library Receives the John E. Rogers Collection

Collection Holds Material Relating to the African American and Black Experience in Hartford

(Hartford, CT - Feb. 12, 2024) Hartford Public Library (HPL) is delighted to announce the recent acquisition of the [John E. Rogers'](#) Collection to the Library's Hartford History Center, gifted to the Library by John E. Rogers' granddaughter Meryth Andrews.

"Black History Month is a time to recognize all the ways Black culture has influenced Hartford and shaped American life," said Mayor Arunan Arulampalam. "This collection depicts stories and legacies of Black residents and leaders who have made significant impacts on our city. It's a beautiful compilation of our local Black history, and we are grateful to John E. Rogers and his granddaughter Meryth for providing future generations with an opportunity to learn from and appreciate these stories."

Over his lifetime, John E. Rogers (1907-1982) accumulated a vast store of historical artifacts, including artwork, articles, photographs and personal histories relating to the Black and African American experience. Among other things, his collection highlights the legacy of Black doctors, legislators and actors from Hartford and the state. Rogers was a prominent historian and lecturer. He received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from the University of Hartford in 1970, where he was a consultant in Black history as well as a lecturer on African American history and culture for regional educational institutions.

"This collection was decades in the making. John E. Rogers approached his work with a scholarly passion. After his passing, dedicated professionals and volunteers worked to realize his dream of building a historical collection to showcase the stories of our neighbors, our business professionals, our poets, our artists, and our writers," said Bridget E. Quinn, HPL President and CEO. "We are proud to provide a home for this collection. The Hartford History Center staff look forward to preserving and making these materials accessible to the public. This goes to the heart of our mission as a public library."

Included in the John E. Rogers Collection are materials relating to the life of Hartford actress and community activist [Marietta Canty \(1905-1986\)](#). Canty became famous for playing domestic workers in Hollywood films, one of the few roles available to Black women at that time. According to an [article in CT Explored \(Spring 2015\)](#), Canty acknowledged the limited roles that were offered Black female actors but said of her career in *The Hartford Courant* in 1978: "You have to realize that for this time this was not so bad. ... We needed the work. It was the only way some of us could get work...so we had to do the best we could with what we had...by doing that, by just sticking it out and pullin' through, we were kind



of the pioneers for all the kids coming up now.” Her house on Mahl Avenue in Hartford’s Clay-Arsenal neighborhood is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Safely stored by members of the John E. Rogers African American Cultural Center for the last 12 years, the historical materials were transferred to the Library’s Hartford History Center’s archival storage area in late 2023. The archival closed stacks shelving space is on the south side of the Downtown Library building, 500 Main Street, an area untouched by the early 2023 water damage to the Downtown Library and far removed from any current construction work. Hartford History Center staff will work to formally inventory and process the collection materials within the next 12-18 months, readying them for public research and exhibition in both physical and digital formats.

“I am so happy that the City and the Library allowed me to play a part in this important project that will assist in highlighting Hartford’s rich history. My late father, Chief John B. Stewart, Jr., and former City Council Majority Leader, would be proud on this day if he were still with us. He spent a lot of time trying to preserve and highlight the importance of the John Rogers’ collection,” said his son and Hartford resident Jeffrey Stewart who was instrumental in building the bridge between the Library, the City and the John E. Rogers’ family.

The John E. Rogers Collection will be a major component of the planned Albany Library (1250 Albany Avenue) renovation and expansion into the neighboring North-West School. HPL is currently developing architectural and interior design plans with community stakeholders and is very responsive to the community’s request for showcasing more local history. The John E. Rogers Collection will provide the bedrock for a new research and cultural center in the North-West School. In addition to special archival shelving, exhibition space and a quiet research area, there will be a Hartford History Center-dedicated archival processing office in the renovated school. Library professionals will mentor community members on collecting, preserving and sharing community stories, ensuring Hartford voices are heard well into the future.

“The City Council works to make things happen in this City and we were delighted to play a role in bringing the John E. Rogers Collection to Hartford Public Library. It is critical all voices are heard and all stories shared in our national and local narratives. Teaching civic engagement at the local level, with relatable role models, is critical for our students today. Our children need to value their voices and the voices of their neighbors, they need to understand and value their potential and what they can bring to our community. And, we need them to vote,” said Hartford City Council President Shirley Surgeon.

ABOUT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Founded as the Library Company in 1774, and over its 250 years, Hartford Public Library has remained at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment, and cultural development for thousands of children, youth, and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance, and youth leadership training. For more information, visit hplct.org, and follow us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#)).

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