



Guide to the Adair Family Papers RG 22

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Westport Museum for History & Culture

25 Avery Place

Westport, CT 06880

Business Number: (203) 222-1424

archives@westporthistory.org

URL: <https://westporthistory.org/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Westport Museum for History & Culture
Creator:	Adair family
Title:	Adair Family Papers
ID:	RG 22
ID [aspace_uri]:	/repositories/36/resources/1449
Date [inclusive]:	1850-1956
Physical Description:	1.5 Linear Feet (3 boxes, 1 portfolio)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The Adair Family Papers document the descendants of Benjamin Adair, who was one of the few prominent Black landowners in Westport during the 19th century.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], , [Box no]., Adair Family Papers, Westport Museum for History and Culture

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Biographical / Historical

Originally hailing from Charleston, South Carolina, where he may have been an enslaved person, Benjamin Adair was one of just a few prominent Black landowners in Westport during the 19th century. While the exact circumstances of Adair's previous life are unknown, the Freedman's Bank Records in New York note that he was the son of Robert and Sarah, who were listed without surnames.

By 1850 Benjamin Adair was working as a waiter in the New York City home of prominent banker Morris Ketchum who would later help finance the Union Army in the Civil War. Ketchum would eventually go on to own an 18th century Westport Estate called Hockanum, where Adair was listed as a coachman in 1860. Adair's wife, Ursula Mingo, was of African and Native descent, with family ties to the Shinnecock Reservation near Southampton, Long Island.

Ursula and Benjamin met in New York and married prior to coming to Connecticut. Ursula seems to have grown up on or near the Shinnecock Reservation. She was one of five children born to Horace Mingo and Eliza Cuff. Ursula and Benjamin would themselves have six children. They were Laura Pheobe, Ursula, Emily, twins Benjamin Robert and Eliza, and Samuel. The twins died young with Benjamin being just under one year old when he passed away and Eliza was about seven and a half. They would also lose their son Samuel at the age of twenty-five.

Once the Adairs reached Westport their fortunes would dramatically change. Mr. Adair purchased his first property on Franklin Avenue in the Saugatuck area of the town in 1852 from Sydney Miller. The property was adjacent to a parcel owned by his boss, Morris Ketchum. A savvy businessperson, Mr. Adair later sold the property to the New York and New Haven Railroad, which was then expanding up the Connecticut shoreline for a massive profit.

Continuing to build his wealth in real estate, Benjamin Adair then purchased about 9 acres of land from Morris Ketchum in 1877 across the road from the Hockanum property at what is today known as "Glynn's Corner"—the intersection of Main Street, Route 136 and Route 57 (Weston Road). For the next 70 years, the Adair family made their homestead a working farm while patriarch Benjamin continued to work for Ketchum. The 1880 Agricultural census shows that their small farm produced 5 tons of Hay, 40 bushels of Indian corn, and 30 bushels of potatoes. They also had cows and used them to produce 300 pounds of butter and their chickens produced 50 dozen eggs. Benjamin's son Samuel ran the family farm.

A prosperous man during his lifetime, Benjamin Adair was able to leave a sizable estate to his wife and daughters, when he died in 1891, aged 65, due to "Intestinal Tuberculosis (contributing: Dropsey)" his son Samuel having tragically died of Tuberculosis just a few years before his father leaving a widow, Hester, who was also his first cousin, as well as their young daughter, Emily. For a while, the family of women continued to live at the homestead until, in the 1920s problems began to arise. The daughters and granddaughters of Benjamin and Ursula were struggling to pay the taxes on time. The elder daughter, Laura, responsible for making the payments no longer lived in Westport, she had moved to a home in Brooklyn, NY and continued her school teaching career. Tax liens were placed on the property but then were paid within a few months. That changed in 1937 when the land value of the estate inexplicably jumped from \$4,644 in 1936 to \$7,740 in 1937 while none of the Adairs' neighbors saw this increase in land value or tax assessments. At the same time, the Merritt Parkway was nearing completion practically in the Adairs' front yard—a circumstance which should have dropped their property values instead of increasing it.

From that point forward, the heirs of Benjamin Adair would struggle mightily to pay the taxes. In 1946, with five years of back taxes owed (a total of \$828.60), the Town of Westport seized the property and auctioned it off to the highest bidder.

Benjamin and Ursula's daughters still went on to have interesting and successful lives, but as black women in the early 20th century they faced obstacles to their success. The eldest Adair daughter, Laura, became a schoolteacher at public schools in Connecticut as well as in Brooklyn, New York. She never married, and when she passed away in 1933, she bequeathed a home in Fairfield to her youngest sister, her share of the family homestead to two of her

nieces, and land on the Shinnecock Reservation to her niece Alice Burbridge. The second daughter of Benjamin and Ursula, also named Ursula, married William Dorsey and they built a home in Saugatuck on Davenport Avenue. They had two daughters, Cynthia (a schoolteacher) and Edith (an interior designer). Edith also had two daughters, Marian, and Cynthia.

The Adairs' third daughter, Emily, married John Vincent and they made their home at the family farm. They had two daughters who survived to adulthood, also losing two daughters and a son in infancy. Their daughters Ruth Cordelia and Alice Viola/Violet each became teachers. Alice married Edwin Burbridge. Their only child, daughter Marguerite Doris Burbridge, would go on to become an internationally renowned dancer who went by the stage name of Mika Mingo.

While the Adair family home still stands on part of its original property it has been massively renovated and added over the years to be unrecognizable today. After the property was sold at auction, the son of the next owner subdivided and sold off all but approximately one acre of the original nine that comprised the farm. There are several housing developments on the land currently.

Today, Mika Mingo's daughter Annette T. Thomas who is also a dancer, lives in Florida with her husband Timothy. J. Thomas. She teaches classical ballet technique as applies to figure skaters. Thomas has three children who comprise the 5th generation of the Adair Family. Thomas' daughter Heather Thomas Flores is an anthropologist working to identify and understand the power dynamics of systemic racism. Daughter Rachel Davis (nee Thomas) is an artist and interior designer with two young children—the 6th generation of Benjamin Adair's Family and son Brendon Thomas, lives in California where he is an executive at Paramount Pictures.

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Scope and Contents

The Adair Family Papers date from 1850 to 1956 and include documentation primarily related to the women of the family – Ursula (Adair), Laura (Adair), Emily (Adair Vincent), Alice Viola (Vincent Burbridge), and Marguerite (Burbridge, known professionally as Mika Mingo). The collection includes correspondence, legal and financial documents, biographical documentation, and numerous photographs. Material related to activities of Mika Mingo includes documentation of the Cranberry Harvest Festival and Native American food and crafts.

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Arrangement

Series 1. Correspondence

Series 2. Legal and Financial Documents

Series 3. Biographical Documentation

Series 4. Photographs

Series 5. Collected Books

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Adair family descendants.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Westport (Conn.)--History.

- African Americans
- African American women teachers.
- Indians of North America

Collection Inventory

Correspondence

Title/Description	Instances	
Margaret Ketchum to Ursula Adair, sympathy upon death of Ursula's daughter, 1869 February 10	Box 1	Folder 1
Bella Jones (future wife of Landon Ketchum) to Ursula Adair, upon death of Ursula's daughter, 1869 February	Box 1	Folder 1
Laura Adair to her sister Emily Vincent , 1923	Box 1	Folder 2
2 postcards and 1 note from Laura Adair to her niece Viola Vincent Burbridge (note attached to photo #40), 1929, undated	Box 1	Folder 2

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Legal and Financial Documentation

Title/Description	Instances	
Legal and financial documents, 1860-1875	Box 1	Folder 3
Legal and financial documents, 1878-1893	Box 1	Folder 4
Legal and financial documents, 1902, 1914	Box 1	Folder 5
Letter conveying documents, 1952	Box 1	Folder 5

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Biographical Documentation

Title/Description	Instances	
Photocopy of marriage certificate of Benjamin Adair and Ursula Mingo, 1954 May 11	Box 1	Folder 6
Oversize portfolio containing diplomas for Alice Viola Vincent, upon graduation from Westport Public Schools (1914), Staples High School (1918), New York University (1930), 1914, 1918, 1930	Folder OV1	
Program from Staples High School Commencement listing oration by Alice Viola Vincent, 1918 June	Box 1	Folder 7

New York Board of education ID card of Viola Vincent, 1943 June	Box 1	Folder 7
Woodcut by Marguerite Burbridge, Undated	Box 1	Folder 7
4 certificates of completion of courses fulfilled by Viola A. Burbridge, City of New York Board of Education, 1949-1952	Box 1	Folder 7
Documentation of participation of Mika Mingo (Marguerite Burbridge) in Cranberry Harvest Festival as Cranberry Princess Silverfoot, 1956	Box 1	Folder 8
Miscellaneous collected documentation regarding the Cranberry Harvest Festival, undated	Box 1	Folder 8
Miscellaneous collected documentation regarding Native American food and crafts, undated	Box 1	Folder 10-11

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Photographs

Portraits

Title/Description	Instances	
Emily Adair Vincent (b. 1859)- 4 photos; John H. Vincent (b. 1860) – 1 photo , undated	Box 1	Folder 12
Ruth Cordelia Vincent (b. 1895) – 6 photos, undated	Box 1	Folder 13
Alica Viola Vincent Burbridge (b. 1900) – 3 photos, undated	Box 1	Folder 14
Marguerite Doris Burbridge (Mika Mingo) (b. 1923) – 16 photos, undated	Box 1	Folder 15
Margaret Ketchum – 1 photo; Morris Ketchum – 1 photo , undated	Box 1	Folder 16
Unidentified men – including possibly Samuel, possibly Benjamin, white man with cane, Native American with weapon – 8 photos, undated	Box 1	Folder 17
Unidentified women possibly including Ursula Sr. or Jr., Cynthia, Edith, Eliza, Minnie, Hester – 13 photos, undated	Box 2	Folder 1
Unidentified children possibly including Eliza, Samuel, Emily Adair (Thompson) – 8 photos, undated	Box 2	Folder 2

Groups

Title/Description	Instances	
Various groupings that include Viola Vincent Burbridge, Edwin Smith Burbridge, Marguerite Burbridge, Ruth C.	Box 2	Folder 3

Vincent, Laura Adair, Emily Vincent, possibly Ursula and Emily Adair – 8 photos, undated

Unidentified family group (framed); Group of children; Adair descendant visiting in Saugatuck, view from train station , undated	Box 2	Folder 4
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Scenes

Title/Description	Instances	
Family farm of Emily and John - 3 photos, undated	Box 2	Folder 5
Textiles and students with textiles – probably from Home Economics classes taught by Viola Vincent – 6 photos, undated	Box 2	Folder 6

Album

Title/Description	Instances	
Partially filled album with photos of unidentified individuals, undated	Box 2	Folder 7

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Collected Books

Belonging to Ursula Mingo Adair

Title/Description	Instances	
Bell Martin by T. S. Arthur (published 1850); Cheap Repository Tracts by Hannah More & others (1852); The Lamplighters (1854) , 1850-1854	Box 3	Folder 1

Belonging to Laura Adair

Title/Description	Instances	
An Old Fashioned Girl by Louisa May Alcott (1870); The Canterbury Poets – Coleridge (1885); The Story of Robins (1864); , 1864-1885	Box 3	Folder 2

Belonging to Emily Adair

Title/Description	Instances	
Little Mary (1865)	Box 3	Folder 3

Belonging to Annette Conklin

Title/Description	Instances	
The Gold Bug by Edgar Allen Poe (1859)	Box 3	Folder 3

Other books, not inscribed

Title/Description	Instances	
New Testament, New Testament with "Eliza" in gold on cover, undated	Box 3	Folder 4

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