



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

**Percival Bryan**

**A Finding Aid to the Percival Bryan Collection, 1932–  
1993, Anacostia Community Museum Archives**

by Vuanya T. Cyrus

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Anacostia Community Museum
<b>Title:</b>	Percival Bryan collection
<b>Creator:</b>	Percival Bryan
<b>Dates:</b>	1932–1993, bulk dates 1942–1980
<b>Quantity or Extent:</b>	5.94 linear feet (20 Boxes)
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Percival Bryan collection, which dates from 1932 to 1993 and measures 5.94 linear feet, documents the career and personal life of Washington, DC cabdriver Percival Bryan. The collection is comprised of an autobiography, autograph albums, citations, correspondence, memorabilia, photographic prints, and printed materials.
<b>Language(s):</b>	English

## Administrative Information

### Provenance

The Percival Bryan collection was donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 1993 by Mr. Bryan's daughter, Rose Dyke.

### Processing Information

The papers were processed in June 2009 by Vuanya T. Cyrus

### Preferred Citation

Percival Bryan collection, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Rose Dyke.

### Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for unrestricted research. Use requires an appointment.

### Ownership and Literary Rights

The Percival Bryan collection is the physical property of the Anacostia Community Museum. Literary and copyright belong to the author/creator or their legal heirs and assigns. Rights to work produced during the normal course of Museum business resides with the Anacostia Community Museum. For further information, and to obtain permission to publish or reproduce, contact the Museum Archives.

## Biographical Note

Percival Bryan was born in Jamaica on January 25, 1906. At the age of 18 years he left

Jamaica, arriving in New York City in August of 1924. To get to the United States from Jamaica Mr. Bryan stowed away on a banana boat. Upon his arrival he took a job as a fruit-wagon vendor.

He left New York for Washington, DC in 1929 where he settled in the northeast section of the city, east of the Anacostia River. In 1941 Mr. Bryan became a United States citizen and he started his career as a driver. Initially, he was a chauffeur for the Office of Emergency Management. Later he served as chauffeur for Attorney General Homer Cummings, at which time he started his first autograph book. He encouraged all of his passengers to sign the books. By the end of his career as a taxicab driver, he had collected over 160,000 signatures.

In addition to his job as a driver, Mr. Bryan worked part-time as a White House butler during the administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman. He also worked for twenty-three year as a steam engineer for the DC Public Schools. Percival Bryan retired on March 15, 1995 and he died on January 27, 1996, just two days after his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Percival Bryan collection, which dates from 1932 to 1993, documents the professional and personal life of Percival Bryan. It contains materials related to Mr. Bryan's education and his career as a cab driver. Most notable is the collection's autograph books which contain over 160,000 signatures. Included in the collection are 298 autograph books, awards and citations, correspondence, diplomas, photographic prints, and printed materials.

### **Arrangement**

The papers are organized into five series. The Photographs series has been further arranged into subseries. The contents of each series and subseries are arranged alphabetically. There are oversize materials in the Biographical and Photographs series, and there are artifacts in the museum collection. The series and subseries are arranged as follows:

- Series I: Autobiographical
- Series II: Biographical
- Series III: Autograph albums
- Series IV: Memorabilia
- Series V: Photographs
  - Subseries 5.1: Portraits
  - Subseries 5.2: Bryans and friends
  - Subseries 5.3: Special events
  - Subseries 5.4: Social groups
  - Subseries 5.5: Travel and recreation
  - Subseries 5.6: Miscellaneous

## **Subjects**

**Topical**

African Americans  
 African American musicians  
 African American neighborhoods  
 Taxicab drivers  
 Jamaican Americans

**Geographical**

Washington (DC)

**Names**

Anderson, Marian, 1897–1993  
 Bryan, Percival  
 Cummings, Homer S. (Homer Stillé), 1870–1956

**Types of Materials**

Autograph albums  
 Correspondence  
 Memorabilia  
 Newspaper clippings  
 Pamphlets  
 Photographic prints

**Series Description/Container List****Series I: Autobiographical, circa 1942 (0.17 linear ft.)**

This series contains handwritten notes and a typescript of Mr. Bryan's autobiography, *Cabbie's Hobby*. A typescript of the first chapter of an alternate autobiography, *As Life Goes On*, is included as well.

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
1	1	Notes, undated
	2	Typescript <i>As Life Goes On</i> , 1942
	3	Typescript <i>Cabbie's Hobby</i> , undated
	4	Typescript <i>Cabbie's Hobby</i> copy, undated

**Series II: Biographical, 1943–1990 (0.11 linear ft.)**

This series contains materials related to Mr. Bryan's career, education, and community service. The documents consist of awards and citations, certifications and licenses, correspondence, housing association records, magazines, and newspaper clippings. Included in the general correspondence is a letter of recommendation written by Attorney General Homer Cummings on behalf of Mr. Bryan.

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
1	5	Alexander Graham Bell Vocational School, 10 June 1957

	6	Correspondence general, 1943, 1990
	7	Correspondence personal, 1951, 1955, undated
	8	DC Council "Percival Bryan Recognition Resolution of 1984" copy, 7 November 1984
1	9	Erie Heights and Washington Housing Associations, 1945–1949
	10	Passenger vehicle licenses and identification cards, 1942–1945, 1973–1980
	11	Printed material, circa 1952–1990 [oversize]

### Oversize

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
20	1	Printed material, circa 1952–1990

### **Series III: Autograph albums, 1941–1993 (4.6 linear ft.)**

This series contains 298 autograph books. His collection started in 1941 with book 1. At this time he obtained the autographs of Attorney General Homer Cummings and several other members of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's cabinet. From that point Mr. Bryan collected over 160,000 autographs from average people and celebrities alike. Within the pages of these books are general greetings, expository, poems, sketches, and even a few watercolors.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
2		November 1941–August 1955
3		April 1956– September 1960
4		September 1960–October 1964
5		October 1964–October 1969
6		October 1969–October 1973
7		August 1973–November 1974
8		October 1974–December 1975
9		November 1975–December 1976
10		November 1976–March 1978
11		December 1977–May 1979
12		May 1979–August 1980
13		August 1980–September 1982
14		September 1982–August 1984
15		April 1984–March 1986
16		March 1986–May 1989
17		May 1989–November 1981
18		November 1991–December 1993

### **Series IV: Memorabilia, 1932–1973 (0.1 linear ft.)**

This series contains memorabilia collected from various sources. Most of the executive branch memorabilia was collected during his tenure as a part-time White House butler between the administrations of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower. This series also contains documents from official ceremonies and notes from Mr. Bryan's travels. Finally, there are programs from cultural events including one from Marian Anderson's cancelled Constitution

Hall concert.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	12	Calling cards, undated
	13	Drawings and notebook from travels, 1952, undated
	14	Event programs, 1943, 1950, 1973
	15	Inauguration, January 1949
	16	Invitations, 1932, 1933, 1946
	17	<u>The Negro in World War II</u> , volume 1, 1944
	18	Letter from President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 20 December 1954
	19	State of the Union Address, 11 January 1944

### **Series V: Photographs, 1939–1984 (.96 linear ft.)**

This series contains photographs of the Bryans and their friends. The Bryans had a very active social life and the majority of these photographs are from social gatherings with family and friends. Additionally, there are publicity photographs of African-American entertainers, some of which are autographed. However, Mr. Bryan admitted that, for the sake of consistency, he autographed some of the photos himself. Finally, there are photographs from his various employment, travels, and recreational activities.

#### **Subseries 5.1: Portraits**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
19	1	Percival Bryan, 1942, 1943, undated [oversize]
	2	Catherine Bryan, 1943, undated [oversize]
	3	Percival and Catherine Bryan, 1944–1947, undated [oversize]
	4	Percival Bryan and others, 1939, 1943, undated
	5	Homer Cummings, 1941, 1942 [oversize]
	6	Kathryn Holmes, 1942–1964
	7	Publicity, 1939–1945, 1984, undated
	8	General portraits, 1942–1959, undated [oversize]

#### **Subseries 5.2: The Bryans and friends**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
19	9	Percival Bryan and friends, undated
	10	Catherine Bryan and friends, undated
	11	The Bryans with family and friends, 1944, undated

#### **Subseries 5.3: Special events**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>
19	12	Parties, 1944–1948, undated [oversize]
	13	Religious ceremonies, 1959, undated

### **Subseries 5.4: Social groups**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
19	14	Erie Heights Civic Association, undated
	15	Federation of the West Indies, 1959
	16	Formal social outings, undated
	17	Royal Deluxe Social Club, 1946, undated [oversize]

### **Subseries 5.5: Travel and recreation**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
19	18	Jamaica, undated
	19	New York and beach, 1950–1953, undated
	20	General travel, undated

### **Subseries 5.6: Miscellaneous**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
19	21	Buildings, 1955, 1956, undated
	22	District of Columbia Public Schools publicity photos, circa 1941–1945
	23	Military personnel, 1947–1955 [oversize]
	24	Miscellaneous, 1942–1950, undated

### **Oversize**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
20	2	Bryan family portraits, 1942–1947, undated
	3	Homer Cummings, 1941, 1942
	4	General portraits, 1942–1959, undated
	5	Parties, 1944–1948, undated
	6	Royal Deluxe Social Club, 1946, undated
	7	Military personnel, 1947–1955
map case 2	drawer 5	Bryan family portraits, 1942–1947, undated