Background on Katherine Bell Banks

Katherine Bell Banks was born to Thomas Bell, M.D., and Pearl Bell in 1912. They moved from their home in Tennessee to Brooklyn, New York in 1916. There they shared a two family house with W.E.B. Du Bois and his family. Dr. Bell and Dr. Du Bois developed a strong friendship during this time and the families remained close for years. The Bells settled in Newark, New Jersey in 1922. Dr. Du Bois remained a frequent guest in the Bells' house, and was godfather to the Bells' youngest daughter, Thomasina.

Katherine enrolled at Montclair University in 1929 after her graduation from Barringer High School in Newark. She received her B.A. in French in 1934 and a year later entered Columbia University where she obtained her M.A. in French. Banks taught at Talladega University in Alabama for seven years and then returned to her alma mater, Barringer High School. She retired from Newark's Vailsburg High School in 1980.
Scope of collection

The Bell collection consists primarily of fifteen letters and one telegram, all written by Du Bois to various members of the Bell family. The earliest was written in September 1926 to Katherine Bell and the latest was written in December 1960, three years before Du Bois’s death, to Thomasina Bell Fitzroy.

These letters offer a unique perspective of Du Bois. Banks writes, "He was seen as a complicated and controversial figure. He seemed austere-and by his own evaluation shy and unrevealing about his private life." She continues, "Lacking is much information about his circle of friends-close friends that is. His letters help to fill that void."

The collection also includes two photographs and an invitation to Du Bois’s seventieth birthday celebration at Atlanta University. The photographs feature Yolande Du Bois in her high school graduation dress and the Du Bois and Bell families at their home in Newark, New Jersey.

Collection inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell</td>
<td>1926 Sept 18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishing Katherine lots of rest, play, and candy; written when Du Bois was in Russia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell</td>
<td>1937 Dec 14</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explaining he is unable to provide Katherine transportation north for the holidays.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell</td>
<td>1939 June 22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming the time of his arrival for dinner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell</td>
<td>1941 Mar 27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming that a letter of recommendation was sent on her behalf to Tennessee State College and advising her to rethink her choice of school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell</td>
<td>1941 Nov 26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inviting her to subscribe to Phylon publication.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell</td>
<td>1943 Apr 21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting his invitation to Easter dinner.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell 1943 May 4 Box 1: 2
Expressing thanks for hosting previous Sunday’s family gathering.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Dr. Thomas Bell 1945 Nov 30 Box 1: 2
Noting his return from Europe and the health of Mrs. Du Bois.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell 1946 June 27 Box 1: 2
Expressing his sympathy upon the death of Dr. Bell.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell 1947 Feb 3 Box 1: 2
Extending his greetings and saying that he is on his way “South and West.”

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Mrs. Thomas Bell 1949 Mar 22 Box 1: 3
Canceling his dinner appointment because he has to attend a “Peace Conference.”

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell 1949 May 22 Box 1: 3
Greetings from the French Riviera, with regards to Katherine’s mother and sister.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Thomasina Yolande Bell Fitzroy 1949 June 2 Box 1: 3
Congratulating her on her recent wedding.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Katherine Bell 1950 Sept 18 Box 1: 3
Greetings upon his recent return from Czechoslovakia and France.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Letter to Thomisina Yolande Bell Fitzroy 1960 Dec 23 Box 1: 3
Catching up on recent family events, and expressing his desire to get together in the future.

Du Bois, W.E.B.: Telegram to Bell family undated Box 1: 3
Instructing the Bells to expect Du Bois on December 24th at three o’clock.

Invitation 1938 Feb 23 Box 1: 4
Seventieth Birthday celebration honoring W.E.B. Du Bois, Atlanta University.

Photograph: Yolande Du Bois 1918 Box 1: 5
Photographs: Bell and Du Bois families, 1944 Box 1: 5

Administrative information
**Access**
The collection is open for research.

**Provenance**
Purchased from Katherine Bell Banks in October 2004.

**Processing Information**
Processed by Matthew Hansbury, December 2004.

**Digitized content**
All material in the collection has been scanned and are available online through our digital repository, Credo.

**Related Material**
Letters in this collection were published in the following book by Katherine Bell Banks describing her family's relationship with W.E.B. Du Bois:


For materials related to W.E.B. Du Bois, see:


**Language:**
English

**Acknowledgments**
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**Search terms**

**Subjects**

**Genre terms**
Names
- Banks, Katherine Bell.
- Bell, Thomas, d.1946.

- Letters (correspondence)
- Photographs.

Link to similar SCUA collections
African American  Du Bois, W.E.B.