

CRANBROOK

ARCHIVES

Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Committee Papers

(1942-2012)

0.21 linear ft.

Acquisition Number:	2017-02
Acquisition:	Gift of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg.
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Citation:	Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Committee Collection Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.
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HISTORY

Clarence Oliver LaGrone was a sculptor, poet and teacher, with a lifelong commitment to universal brotherhood. The Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Committee was formed to honor him for his spirit, personable manner, and accomplishments.

Oliver was born December 9, 1906 in McAlester, Oklahoma to Lula Evelyn and William Lee LaGrone. His father came from Mississippi and moved to Alabama where he became an AME Zion minister. In search of employment opportunities, he and Lula settled in Oklahoma, where they raised their family.

In 1928, Oliver moved to Washington, D.C. where his brother was working, and enrolled at Howard University. Leaving the following year to help his family move to Albuquerque, New Mexico, he was unable to return as his father passed away in 1930. Oliver took on a variety of jobs to support the family. One of them lead to an opportunity to study at the University of New Mexico, after a friend of the family he worked for exhibited his work at a large bank. The sculpture also caught the attention of a newspaper correspondent, Ernie Pyles, who wrote a column about LaGrone.

Oliver graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1938 with a major in Sociology and a minor in Art. There, he also met and married Irmah Cooke, a fellow student at the University of New Mexico, who moved there from Gary, Indiana. Oliver declined a scholarship to study with Glenn Lukens at the University of Southern California to move to Indiana, where he accepted a teaching position with the South Bend Art Academy. Soon after, they moved to Idlewild, Michigan, before settling in Detroit with their new baby, Joy.

Oliver was enrolled to study advanced sculpture with Carl Milles at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in November 1941 and received a McGregor Fund Grant in 1942. He left Cranbrook after two years, during the last years of the Second World War, and went to work at the Ford plant. In the 1950's, he served as a United Auto Workers international representative, but lost his job during the McCarthy era after refusing to be an informant. He took his first teaching job in 1954, working as a substitute teacher for the Detroit Public School System, then taking a permanent position at Arch St. Elementary School. He returned to study and graduated from Wayne State University in 1960 with an MA equivalent in Special Education. He left Detroit in 1967 to avoid the riots and joined the faculty of Northwestern High School.

In 1970, Oliver was invited to lecture in art education and Afro-American history at Pennsylvania State University. He was appointed Special Assistant to the Vice President of undergraduate education in 1972, and in 1975, became artist-in-residence for all 21 branches of

the university system. He also served as artist-in-residence at the Hershey Foundation and the Boas Arts Magnet Center for Learning in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Having divorced from Irmah in 1946, Oliver married Lillian Mitchell in 1976.

Oliver was a member of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg from 1970 to 1986. The Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Fund was established in 1972 by members of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, and in 1974, Oliver contributed the proceeds from the sale of his 'The Dancer' sculpture to the fund. The scholarship is awarded annually to a graduate of the Harrisburg School District to support post-secondary education, including tuition, books, boarding, transportation, child care, etc. The scholarship has a mentor component, where a mentor is matched with the scholar to provide support and encouragement. In 1983, February 3rd was declared Oliver LaGrone Day in Harrisburg, PA. In the mid-1990s, Oliver returned to Detroit, where he died on October 15, 1995, at the age of 89.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection contains biographical materials, correspondence, memorial leaflets, newspaper clippings, and publicity materials for events and lectures, which document the life and work of Oliver LaGrone, and the activities of the Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Committee in Harrisburg, PA. Two poems about and by LaGrone are included, as well as a master's thesis about LaGrone. As it is a small collection, there are no series and folders are arranged alphabetically.

RELATED COLLECTIONS

- C. Oliver LaGrone Papers (1997-01)
- Cranbrook Academy of Art: Records of the Administration (1981-09)
- Cranbrook Academy of Art Publications (1998-05)

Box Number--Description

Box 1

1. Appraisals—Artwork, 2000-2001
2. Biographical, n.d.
3. Certificate—State of Michigan Special Tribute, 1990
4. Correspondence—General, 2005-2017
5. Correspondence—LaGrone, 1938-1994, n.d.
6. Memorials, 1995-1998
7. News Clippings—Copies, 1977-2012
8. News Clippings—Originals, 1975-1995
9. Poetry, 1989, n.d.
10. Publicity Materials, 1997-2017, n.d.
11. Thesis—“Oliver LaGrone: Time Walker,” 1976, 2013