

# RELIVING HISTORY

*Dunbar Association's archival display documents its social advocacy*



> Newspaper clippings feature the Dunbar Association, including poetry from African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. | John C. Liao, Staff Photo

By | Jennifer Moncayo  
Staff reporter

**The materials are available for all to see, just remember to call ahead for an appointment**

**T**hough unknown to many in the Syracuse community, the Dunbar Association, Inc., 1453 S. State St., has more than 1,000 items in its archive that chronicles the rich history of African-Americans in Syracuse. The archive contains everything from newspaper clippings on the organization to letters from civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr.

"The archive shows the role that Dunbar played in not just the history of African-Americans but in the history of the United States," said former executive director of the Dunbar Association, Sharon Jack-Williams, who stepped down from the position on Feb. 11 in a cost-saving move for the organization.

"There are a number of parallels between what is going on in the country, by way of freedom movements and civil rights movements, and the things being addressed in Syracuse by [the] Dunbar [Association]," said Jack-Williams, who was with the organization for

eight years.

Founded in 1918, the Dunbar Association was modeled as a community center to provide recreational activities for youth, as well as a settlement house to aid African-Americans from the South to the North. The founders chose to name the organization after Paul Laurence Dunbar, a famous African-American poet.

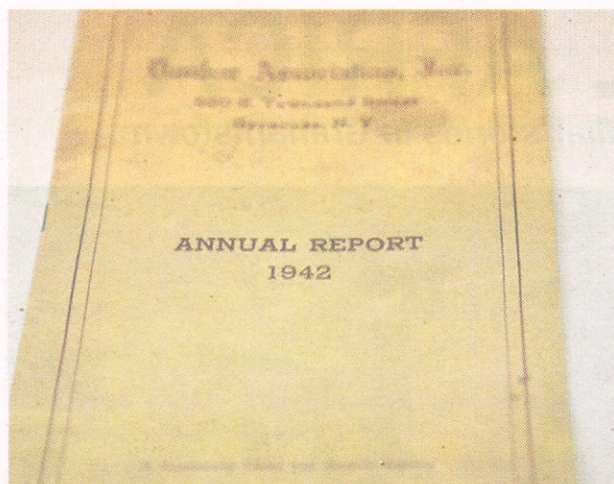
"Dunbar started as an answer to segregation, but it evolved into something much greater," Jack-Williams said.

The archival exhibit documents the social advocacy of Dunbar, said Louella Williams, interim executive director for the Dunbar Association. For example, Dunbar has records from the 1960s when executive director Frank Wood contacted civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, and Thurgood Marshall to visit Dunbar.

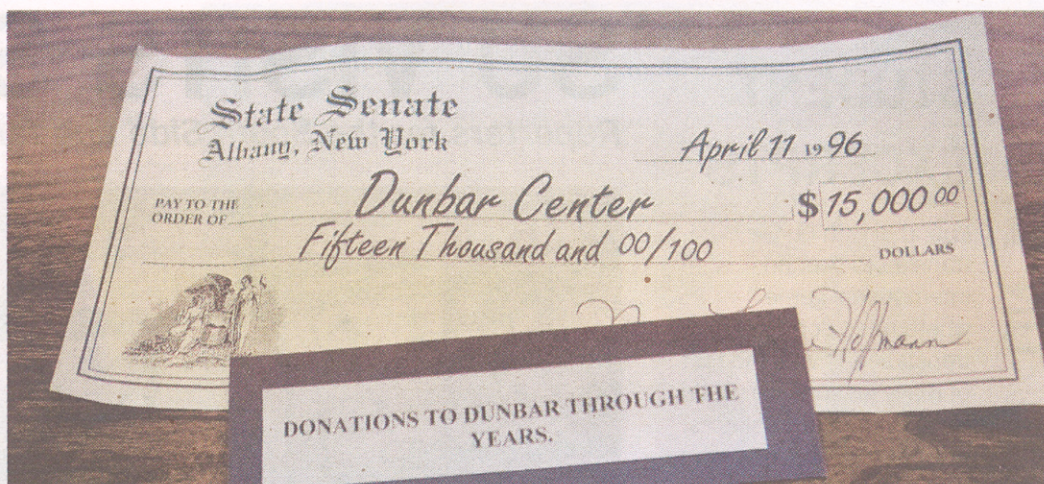
"We think it might have been for a speaker series," Jack-Williams said.

Although the civil rights leaders could not attend, Dunbar has the original signed letters in response to Wood's request. "It's quite remarkable," Jack-Williams said. "It shows how connected Dunbar was to the civil





> The 1942 annual report is part of the archival display. | John C. Liau, Staff Photo



> The Dunbar Association received several donations over its history, including \$15,000 from the New York State Senate in 1996. | John C. Liau, Staff Photo



> The Dunbar Association is named after Paul Laurence Dunbar. | John C. Liau, Staff Photo



> The Dunbar Drum and Bugle Corps is featured in the Pride of Syracuse Magazine in 1949. | John C. Liau, Staff Photo

rights movement and how connected the African-American leaders were.”

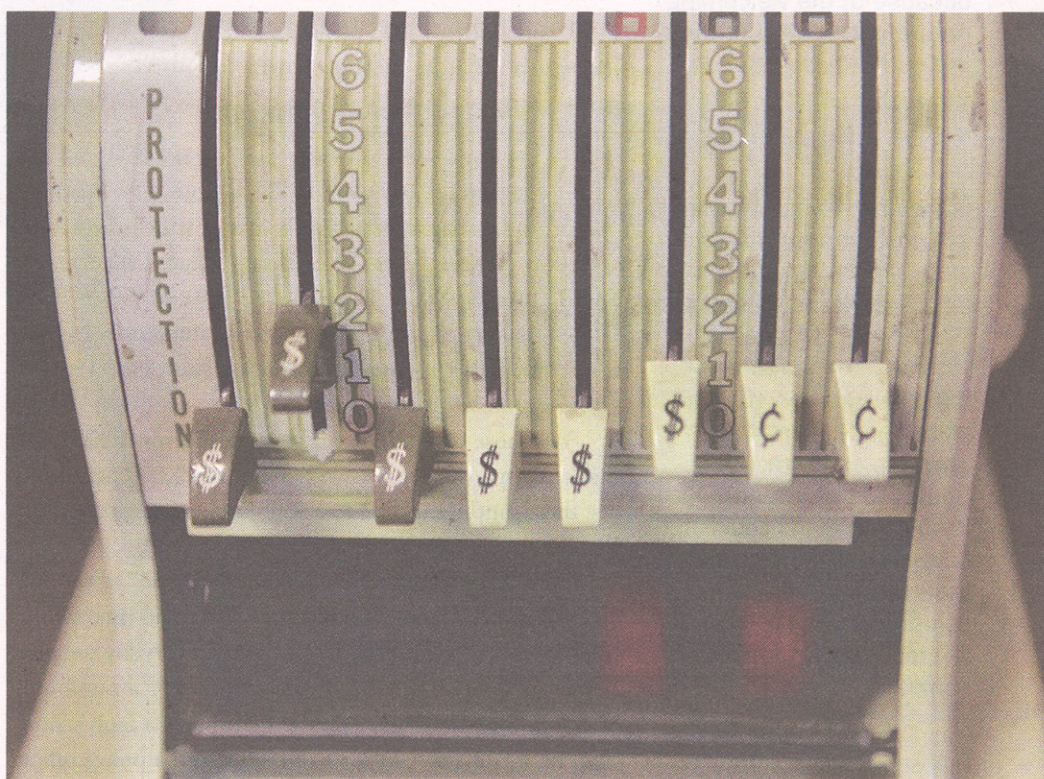
The archival display is housed at the Dunbar Association. However, the materials are not permanently out for public viewing. Visitors must contact Dunbar and make a request to see the display, and the staff will then pull out the materials.

“Any time somebody wants to come in and see the archival exhibit, they just need to make an appointment,” Jack-Williams said.

In the future, Dunbar hopes to secure funding for the archival process and create a more permanent display.

In the meantime, Dunbar shared archive pieces with the Onondaga Historical Association, 321 Montgomery St., for the Black History Preservation Project. OHA collected artifacts on African-Americans in Syracuse and featured the exhibit at the museum during the month of February. OHA also plans to put all of the artifacts from the exhibit in a digital museum.

“Archival histories help you understand more than just the place that the documents represent, it also gives you a more global perspective,” Jack-Williams said.



> An old cash register sits in the archive room at the Dunbar Association. | John C. Liau, Staff Photo