



## **John William Boone Heritage Foundation Collection (C4487)**

**Collection Number:** C4487

**Collection Title:** John William Boone Heritage Foundation Collection

**Dates:** 1869-1929, 1961-2014

**Creator:** John William Boone Heritage Foundation

**Abstract:** Materials pertaining to musicians John W. “Blind” Boone and “Blind” Thomas Green Wiggins Bethune. Includes biographical material, publicity items, contracts, correspondence, clippings, programs, royalty statements, photographs, piano rolls, sheet music, and audio recordings. Also contains material on the foundation’s Blind Boone Ragtime and Early Jazz Festival, including grant material.

**Collection Size:** 1.4 cubic feet, 5 piano rolls, 1 audio tape, 1 audio disc, 2 jpgs, 13 oversize items (65 folders)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia](http://The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia). If you would like more information, please contact us at [columbia@shsmo.org](mailto:columbia@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *John William Boone Heritage Foundation Collection* (C4487); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

**Donor Information:** The collection was donated to the University of Missouri by Raymond A. Beck for the City of Columbia and Clyde Ruffin on November 8, 2005. Additional material was donated by Lorah Steiner for the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau on June 22, 2006, and October 31, 2008; C. Ferreira in October 2006; Lucille Salerno on August 9, 2017, and an unknown date; and Clyde Ruffin on November 7, 2019 (Accession CA6088).

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the *John William Boone Heritage Foundation Collection* can be found in the following collections:

[John William "Blind" Boone and Wesley Boone Papers, \(C2883\)](#)

[Blind Boone Memorial Foundation, Inc. Papers \(C3664\)](#)

[John William "Blind" Boone Piano Roll \(CA5843\)](#)

["Blind Boone's Piano Music," Frank Townsell \(CA5761\)](#)

**Processed by:** Processed by Heather Richmond on May 27, 2022.

### **Historical Note:**

John William Boone, born May 17, 1864, to a formerly enslaved mother, became a musical prodigy during his boyhood. Blind since the age of six months, he could remember and play any musical piece by ear after only hearing it once. Boone learned to play piano while attending the Missouri School for the Blind, and he began performing at a young age. John Lange, Jr., a formerly enslaved man who owned an entertainment hall in Columbia, Missouri, became Boone's manager in 1879. Together they traveled to small towns in the Midwest where Boone played piano in churches and entertainment halls.

Boone played both classical and popular music, eventually combining them in his own compositions to create a sound that many have credited with inspiring the development of ragtime music. This style of music drew larger audiences, and Boone eventually became one of the first Black artists recorded by the QRS piano roll company in 1912. His recordings *Camp Medley No. 1: Strains from the Alleys* and *Rag Medley No. 2: Strains from the Flat Branch* are considered two of his most significant recordings.

In 1889 Boone married John Lange Jr.'s sister, Eugenia Lange. They bought a house at 10 North Fourth Street in Columbia, Missouri.

John Lange died in 1916. Beginning in 1922, Wayne B. Allen served as Boone's manager, though he had been publishing Boone's music prior to that. Allen owned a music store, the Allen Music Company, in Columbia, Missouri. Boone retired in June of 1927. In October 1927, he suffered a heart attack and died at the age of 63. With little money left to his name, Boone was buried without a marker in the Black section of the Columbia cemetery.

Boone was all but forgotten until the 1950s, when various historical and music organizations began working to reestablish his place in history. In 1961 the Blind Boone Memorial Foundation formed in Columbia and gave a concert of Boone's music, and the Columbia-Boone County Sesquicentennial Commission erected a tombstone on Boone's grave in 1971.

In 1997, the John William Boone Heritage Foundation was founded to preserve the Boone home at 10 North Fourth Street as a community center dedicated to Black culture. The City of Columbia purchased the house and partnered with the Foundation to restore, preserve, and manage the home. It has been listed on the National Register of Historic places at the federal level.

The John William "Blind" Boone Heritage Foundation also held an annual festival beginning in 1998. Modeled after Sedalia's Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival, The Blind Boone Ragtime and Early Jazz Festival was held in May or June of each year until 2015. Columbia's Lucile Salerno

was instrumental in organizing these festivals, applying for grants from the Missouri Arts Council, the Missouri Humanities Council, and others. Salerno was chair of the John William Boone Heritage Foundation and hosted a ragtime radio hour on KOPN, the local radio station. She was highly involved in the local, state, and national ragtime community.

In 2005, the City of Columbia purchased some original documents relating to "Blind" Boone as well as to the musical prodigy "Blind Tom" Green Wiggins Bethune. The seller was music collector Robert Michael "Mike" Montgomery. The John William Boone Heritage Foundation helped orchestrate the sale and the donation of the materials to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection (now the State Historical Society of Missouri).

### **Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into the following seven series:

Mike Montgomery  
Historical Materials  
Administrative  
Activities and Events  
Other festivals, concerts, and organizations  
Audio  
Oversize

### **Scope and Content Note:**

#### **Mike Montgomery**

This small series is the most historically significant, and it is of interest to anyone looking for original materials documenting Blind Boone. Robert Michael "Mike" Montgomery purchased original John William "Blind" Boone materials from the daughter of Wayne B. Allen, Boone's last manager. The correspondence, 1913-1925, folder consists primarily of correspondence between Allen and various music companies, including a 1913 letter written to Allen from Boone when Boone was still with Lange. The contracts and agreements folder includes an original contract with the QRS Company from 1912 and a copy of an undated agreement with the Vocal Style Music Company. Statements of royalties from the QRS Company can be found in folder 5. Various advertisements for performances can be found in folder 6, including a broadside featuring Lange and Boone. "Blind Tom" Wiggins materials are primarily originals and copies of early magazine articles and biographies of Tom, copies of musical scores, modern biographical material, and a copy print photograph.

#### **Historical Research**

This series consists of materials pertaining to modern research into the life of John William "Blind" Boone, as well as research into the history of ragtime in general. Much of the ragtime research was generated by Lucille Salerno. Also included in this series are two JPG images of Boone's servant, John Samuels. One image is an edited version of the other.

#### **Administrative**

This series is small and incomplete. By-laws, tax exempt information, a folder of correspondence, and two sets of minutes from 2012 give some basic information about the operation of the organization. Proposition 4 materials document political involvement in a City of Columbia tax proposal to benefit the arts.

### **Activities and Events**

This series makes up the bulk of the collection, and it is the most complete. Much of this material was generated by Lucille Salerno, and it primarily documents the annual J.W. "Blind" Boone Festival, a ragtime festival held from 1999-2015 in Columbia, Missouri. Folders 25-46, organized by year, document the organization of the festival, including correspondence with organizers, participants, performers, and attendees; advertising; financial documents; post-festival audience surveys; programs; and biographies of performers. Some years are more complete than others, with the initial year of the festival, 2009, being the most well-documented. Newsletters produced by various ragtime organizations around the country can be found in folders 35-36; there are scattered newsletters in other parts of the collection, as well. The grants section in this series primarily includes applications, correspondence, and reports for grants that funded the Blind Boone Festival. Grantors included the Missouri Humanities Council and the Missouri Arts Council. Folders 23 and 52 are the only folders documenting the Blind Boone Historic Home.

### **Other Festivals, Concerts, and Organizations**

This series is primarily materials collected by Lucille Salerno when attending other ragtime events in Missouri and elsewhere. Salerno's interest in ragtime went beyond her involvement in the Blind Boone Heritage Association; she was also heavily involved in KOPN, Columbia's community radio station, and had a long-running ragtime show on the station. As such, KOPN materials occasionally show up here, along with materials from Columbia-area ragtime fans in general.

### **Audio**

This series consists primarily of recordings of Blind Boone and Blind Tom. It includes five piano rolls, four of which are Blind Boone recordings and one of which is of Blind Tom. The disk is a recording of the song "Brilliant Quartet" by Blind Tom. The reel-to-reel audio tape is an interview of Worley Winrott Benedict on March 24, 1967, in which Benedict plays piano, listens to recordings of Boone, and reminiscences about seeing Boone perform. The interviewer is an unnamed man.

### **Oversize**

This series consists largely of magazines, magazine articles, and sheet music. The articles mostly concern Blind Tom, and the sheet music consists of both Blind Boone compositions and Blind Tom compositions. Music and articles are all originals. Also included is an original broadside advertising a performance of Blind Boone with Marguerite Day.

### **Container List:**

#### **Mike Montgomery Series**

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| f. 1-8  | John William "Blind" Boone  |
| Box 001 | f. 1 Mike Montgomery Correspondence, 1969, undated  |
|         | f. 2 Blind Boone Biographies, 1967, undated   |
|         | f. 3 Correspondence, 1913-1925  |
|         | f. 4 Contracts and Agreements, 1912, undated  |
|         | f. 5 Financial, 1912-1929   |
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|         | f. 7 Copy Print of Photograph Identified as Blind Boone, with Correspondence, 1984, undated |
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| f. 12  | Life of Boone Teaching Packet, undated                         |
| f. 13  | Blind Boone / Ragtime History, 2002-2011                       |
| f. 14  | Ragtime Research, 1995-2003, undated                           |
| b.d. 1 | 2 jpg images of John Samuels, Servant to John W. "Blind" Boone |

### Administrative Series

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| f. 17 | 501(c)(3) Original Letter According Exempt Status, 1998 |
| f. 18 | Brochure and Button, undated                            |
| f. 19 | Proposition 4, November 1999                            |
| f. 20 | Minutes, 2012   |

### Activities and Events Series

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| f. 22    | Missouri Theater – Piano Dedication – 9/19/1999 and 4/15/2000         |
| f. 23    | Blind Boone Historic Home, 2005-2010                                  |
| f. 24    | 2011 Holiday Concert  |
| f. 25-46 | J.W. "Blind" Boone Festival   |
|          | f. 25-28 1999   |
|          | f. 29 2000 Festival Ads and Write-ups                                 |
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|          | f. 37 2007-2008   |
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	f. 52	Boone County Bank Community Trust, Historic Home Fundraising, 2003-2005
	f. 53	Fiscal Year 2004 Missouri Humanities Council Grant, 2004
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	f. 55	Grants, 2005, 2009
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### Other Festivals, Concerts, and Organizations Series

f. 59	Mimi Blais Concert, 1995
f. 60	1999 Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival, Sedalia
f. 61	Blackwater Milne Concerts, 1999-2000
f. 62	Other Festivals and Concerts, 2000-2003
f. 63	17th Annual West Coast Ragtime Festival, 2003
f. 64	Scott Joplin's Treemonisha, Overland Park, Kansas, 2004
f. 65	Other Organizations, 2003-2004

### Audio Series

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piano roll 2	"Dixie" played by Blind Boone
piano roll 3	"Gavotte Chromatique" played by Blind Boone
piano roll 4	"Last Dream" played by Blind Boone
piano roll 5	"Battle of Manassas" played by Blind Tom
a.t. 1	Interview with Worley Benedict re: Blind Boone, 1967
a.d. 1	"Brilliant Quartet," performed by Blind Tom, July 2, 1896

### Oversize Series

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Item #2	<i>Musical and Home Journal</i> , November 1886
Item #3	<i>The Etude: Presser's Music Magazine</i> clipping, February 1918
Item #4	<i>The Etude Music Magazine</i> , August 1940
Item #5	<i>Folio</i> clipping, January 1875
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Item #6	<i>Compositions of Blind Boone</i> , undated
Item #7	<i>Blind Boone's Southern Rag Medley No. One: Strains from the Alleys</i> , 1908
Item #8	<i>Blind Boone's Southern Rag Medley No. Two: Strains from the Flat Branch</i> , 1909
Item #9	<i>Oliver Gallop and Virginia Polka</i> , by Blind Tom, undated
Item #10	<i>Cyclone Galop Composed by Blind Tom</i> , 1887

- Item #11      *Mother Dear Mother I still Think of Thee, Sung by Blind Tom,*  
undated
- Item #12      *Popular Marches Battle Pieces Etc. for Piano or Organ, 1884*
- Item #13      Broadside, Blind Boone Concert Co., undated

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