

Ritz Cab and Ritz Cafe

Historic African American Businesses in Denver
2016

MS-ARL100

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Denver Public Library
2016

Ritz Cab and Ritz Café Photographs

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SIZE:	1 box (.25 linear feet)
Location:	AARL Rg6A; Sec5; Sf2, 1 Box
PROCESSED by:	Deborah Parsons, Volunteer Archivist
PROJECT MANAGER:	Charleszine "Terry" Nelson
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:	In 1920, William A. and Ida Lewis operated the Ritz Café and Restaurant at 26 th and Welton Street. There, they sold things from candies to sit-down meals. It was known for the Sunday before church brunch which generated the slogan "grits at the Ritz". The café was a member of the Denver Colored Chamber of Commerce.

They started the Ritz Cab Company with one vehicle. They owned four cabs at the start of World War II. They eventually took over nearly all of the small cab services in East Denver. The cab company later moved to 27th and Welton Street, taking over a gas station that was formerly owned by Albert Prickel.

Min's Cab Company at 2558 Welton Street was the Ritz Cab's major competition. The larger fleet was owned by Minnie Schroyer who lived on the site. As a sideline, she sold fried chicken to her cabbies. Other companies included: Radio Cab at 2622 Welton Street; Walton's Taxi, the business motto of which was "see nothing, say nothing"; and, during World War II, John's Cab which carried black servicemen.

After World War II, a number of black owned and operated cab companies brought white patrons to Five Points for the jazz experience; and, for bootleg liquor, among other enticements. Lil's after hours club at 29th and Welton had an acclaimed white guitar player named Bob Gray. It is where Flip Wilson, then an unknown comedian, hung out. Bill Good, the only white Ritz Cab driver, helped Flip be discovered at Duncan's Cotton Club in Colorado Springs in 1955.

There was also an after-hours liquor store at 29th and Welton that the cabbies called "The Bootlegger", where cars lined up and down the street late into the night. Bill Good facilitated a hand-off system at the Continental Trailways bus terminal lockers at 17th and Broadway for white patrons who did not wish to venture into Five Points personally.

(Sources: Images of America: "The Heart of Historic East Denver: Five Points", Phil Goldstein, p. 155 and "Five Points Neighborhood of Denver", Laura M. Mauck, p. 81)

SCOPE AND CONTENT: Photographs of the Ritz Cab drives and cars; Zion Baptist Church programs; newspaper clippings and an obituary for Mother Agnes L. Lewis make up the collection.

SERIES DESCRIPTION: The box contains ten file folders of photographs, newspaper clippings and programs.

CONTAINER LISTING:

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| Box 1 | FF1 | Black & white photo of 17 men, 1 woman, Ritz cabs in front of the Colorado State Capitol building (2 copies) |
| Box 1 | FF2 | Black & white photo of Ritz Service Co. (plus 2 copies) |
| BOX 1 | FF3 | Ritz Cab Co. office with 29 men, 3 women, several cabs pictured |
| Box 1 | FF4 | Ritz Café with 15 women and 2 men pictured |
| Box 1 | FF5 | Kappa Omega Chi Chapter, First Annual Dance, Alpha Chi Pi Omega Sorority (Beauticians); <i>Charles Johnson (beautician in John's shop); Audrey Cowans – John's third prize winner; Walter (friend of John's); "King" John Bryant; Bessie (friend of Struts); Shirley Green (girl in the middle, John's first prize winner; Struts and me</i> |
| Box 1 | FF6 | 4 Buicks in front of the Colorado State Capitol building with 7 men and one woman (2 copies) |
| Box 1 | FF7 | Zion Baptist Church Sunday program, 11/25/2007 |
| Box 1 | FF8 | Zion Baptist Church Education Ministry packet |
| Box 1 | FF9 | 12x18 newspaper advertisement for scalp specialist |
| Box 1 | FF10 | Copies of obituaries of Mother Agnes L. Lewis; copy of the Denver Star weekly newspaper, 1/3/1937 |