

**McLean County Museum of History**

**John (Jack) Waddell Collection**

Processed by  
JoAnna Mink  
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**Collection Information**

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1968 to 2016
RESTRICTIONS:	None
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	See also: Bloomington-Normal Black History Project Collection, Box 6: Folder 130 and Photos—People: Waddell, Jack and Waddell, John

## Brief History

John Austin Waddell's 50-year career spanned the stages of America and Europe, but it started in Bloomington and at Illinois Wesleyan. Jack Waddell graduated from Bloomington High School in 1959, where his talent for singing was recognized by his teacher, Mary Selk. He sang for the BHS choir and joined a local community choir established by IWU Professor of Voice Henry Charles. Impressed with Waddell's voice, Charles arranged for him to take private lessons. "I told him, 'I can't afford lessons.' I was living with my mother and grandparents, and we didn't have money. But he let me work off the lessons," says Waddell. "He also connected me with a scholarship for Illinois Wesleyan." Waddell was in the Chapel and Collegiate choirs, the Singing Titans, Madrigals, and Opera Theatre. The experience gave him confidence to tackle the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

After graduation in 1963 as a music voice major, Waddell set his sights on New York, where it was assumed by his fellow performers that he would teach music. There were very few African-Americans in opera at that time, and almost all of them were women. Realizing that opportunities were greater for black performers in Europe, Waddell moved to West Germany in 1967. Members of Bavaria's Bad Reichenhall Philharmonic Orchestra heard of the talented young American singer and came to hear Waddell in person. Consequently, he was signed up as a visiting soloist and had his European debut. Waddell continued to sing and perform abroad for the next two decades, always in demand for German stage and TV. The West German government even considered Waddell a German citizen, issuing him a passport.

His first major U.S. exposure came in 1969, after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., when Waddell put together an NBC television tribute to King that featured classic African-American spirituals.

Waddell was also a voice coach. During his first show in Germany—a production of *Hair* with Donna Summer—he was asked to be a vocal coach. When he returned to New York, he knew it was time to give back and become a teacher. From his studio on 49th Street in New York City, Waddell counted among his students many top, young Broadway performers. Among his students was Brandon Victor Dixon, who was nominated for a Tony award in 2006 for "Best Performance by a Featured Actor in a Musical" for his role in *The Color Purple*.

(Summarized from "A Voice of Experience" by Rachel Hatch, *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*, Winter 2007)

## Scope

Collection contains newspaper clippings, performance programs, photos, and ephemera tracing Jack Waddell's operatic career (mostly in Germany), other musical performances, as well as awards and achievements.

## Box and Folder Inventory

### Folder 1: Biographical Material

- 1.1 Handwritten notes, c. 2006
- 1.2 Business cards (2), voice teacher, c. 2006

### Folder 2: Programs

- 2.1 Gershwin concert, Das Sonfonie Ochester Berlin, Berlin, German, May 20, 1973
- 2.2 "O Freedom," Michigan State University School of Music, February 16, 17, 2004
- 2.3 "The Color Purple," Broadway Theatre, New York, December 2, 2005 (features Waddell student Brandon Dixon)

### Folder 3: Reviews and Newspaper Clippings

- 3.1 "Showbombe des Jahres: John Waddell und Charles Williams," undated, no source
- 3.2 "In memoriam M. Luther King" *Nuernberger Zeitung*, May 23, 1968
- 3.3 "Spirituals Ernst und heiter," undated, no source
- 3.4 Kocher, Greg, "Robeson role model for symphony singer," *Sun* [?], undated
- 3.5 "Waddell honors Robeson," Week's End, *The Leader* (Corning, NY), February 7, 1991
- 3.6 "Musical 'Twain' Hits Its Mark," *New York Daily News*, August 7, 1996 (with brochure)
- 3.7 "First-Class Inductees," *Pantagraph*, September 21, 2007 (about Waddell being inducted into the Bloomington School District's Hall of Fame)
- 3.8 "Ex-choir director leads alumni," *Pantagraph*, May 26, 2016

### Folder 4: Publicity and Flyers

- 4.1 "An Evening with Williams and Waddell," *Gospels and Spirituals*, Berlin, Germany, December 16, 1981
- 4.2 Broadway Shotime, "John Waddell und Charles Williams" [in German], undated
- 4.3 *O! Freedom! A True American Story*, Rome, Italy, about TV documentary, 2005
- 4.4 "Living for the Cause of Freedom" flyer, JWS Entertainment, Naples, NY

## LOOSE

**Black leather binder** (11 x 13 ¾" with plastic sleeves). Contains newspaper clippings, programs, photos with captions, cover of *Stern* magazine, mostly in German and relating to Waddell's performances in Germany. Other items in this binder include certificates to Blue Key National Honor Fraternity and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity, newspaper clippings and programs of performances in the U.S., several personal photos.

**Blue plastic 3-ring binder** (10 ½ x 12" with plastic sleeves). Contains newspaper clippings and programs from 1958 to 1999, mostly in English, as well as some photos.