



## **Guide to the Fannie B. Rosser papers, 1867-1973, 2012**

---

This collection guide was produced in **1996**.

This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

[askRL@duke.edu](mailto:askRL@duke.edu)

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

---

## Table of Contents

---

<a href="#">Summary</a> .....	3
<a href="#">Background</a> .....	4
<a href="#">Administrative Information</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Names and Subjects</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Collection Inventory</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Papers</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Photographs</a> .....	9

## Summary

---

**Collection Title:**

Fannie B. Rosser papers, 1867-1973, 2012

**Creator:**

Rosser, Fannie B.

**Abstract:**

Fannie B. Rosser (1884-1973) was an African American businesswoman from Lynchburg, Virginia, and long-term resident of Durham, North Carolina. Correspondence, legal and financial papers, printed materials, ephemera, and photographs document Rosser's personal relationships and professional activities, including her close ties with female family members and friends; the management of properties in Lynchburg and Durham; personal loans; and her financial investments in stocks and bonds. A series of 114 photographs dates from about 1872-1956 and includes several tintypes and albumen prints of Fannie's grandmother, an ambrotype of an unknown young woman of color, and many albumen and gelatin silver photographs of Rosser's African American family and friends from Lynchburg, Virginia, Durham, N.C., and other places.

**Extent:**

1.5 Linear Feet (3 boxes)

**Language:**

Materials in English

**Collection ID:**

RL.01111

**Permalink:**

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1v082>

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Fannie B. Rosser papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Background

---

### Scope and Content

The papers of Fannie B. Rosser document the personal and professional life of a single Black businesswoman living in Durham, North Carolina in the early to mid-20th century. Correspondence, legal and financial papers, printed materials, and photographs reflect both her business activities and her relationships with close friends and family members, particularly women, from the 1870s to the early 1970s.

The bulk of the correspondence until the 1950s pertains to Rosser's business ventures, including maintenance of her property, personal loans made to family and friends, and her investments in government stocks and bonds. Letters from her lifelong friend and business partner, Virginia Randolph of Lynchburg, Virginia, document the process of maintaining Rosser's rental property over the course of thirty years. They highlight, among other things, the apparent ghettoization of the neighborhood in which her houses were situated, and Randolph's personal and financial response to that process.

Friends and family members often deferred financial matters to Rosser, and were often dependent on her for monetary support. The correspondence illustrates Rosser's financial acumen and the extent to which her personal relationships and business activities overlapped. Of particular interest is an exchange with the Wilhoites, a couple to whom she loaned \$1000 during the Depression. Their correspondence illustrates the personal nature of her business dealings and the difficulties Rosser had in balancing finances and friendships.

Later correspondence centers around Rosser's relationships with her foster daughter Mattie Burton Meyers and niece June Rosser Penick. There are scattered references to the political climate of the 1960s, and correspondence from Mattie mentions her work with the NAACP. A folder of printed materials includes news clippings on family events and local politics, church programs, and obituaries, as well a 2012 published biography of Mattie written by her granddaughter Sharon Revis-Green.

A large series of financial and legal papers, 1895-1969, document in detail Rosser's investments, insurance policies, and legal activities. Many of these documents are associated with firms such as the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, where Rosser was employed for about 30 years.

The 114 photographs in the collection (early 1870s-circa 1956) are mostly individual portraits and group photographs of Rosser and Harris family members and friends. Among the formats are one ambrotype, several tintypes, and many albumen and gelatin silver prints. The earliest photographs are of

Peggy Harris, Fannie's grandmother (c. 1813-1888) and a young woman who is likely Fannie's mother Annetta Harris or a sister. The photographs indicate that both families were of mixed race descent and were people of means; some of the family members may have been free persons of color before the Civil War.

## **Biographical/Historical**

Fannie Jane Brodie Rosser, born in 1884 in Lynchburg, Virginia, was the daughter of Edmond (or Edmund) Burgess Rosser (1851-1929) and Annetta (Nettie) Harris Rosser (1856-1894); her siblings were Maggie, Pansy, Joseph Irvin, and James Boyd Rosser. Fannie's father, Edmond Burgess Rosser, Sr., is recorded as the son of an Edmund Rosser and a woman named "Britania" or Brittania, and was reportedly born in Appomatox; his occupations are listed as working for Norfolk and Western, and as a brakeman and porter for the Pullman Palace Car Company; he owned the family home. He was recorded in official documents chiefly as Edmund Rosser, but is listed on his death certificate as Edmond Rosser, Jr., and his father's name as Edmond Rosser, Sr. Fannie's mother Annetta died in 1894 when Fannie was about 10, and her father married Callie Higginbotham in 1902; she was from Amherst, Virginia. The family on both sides is recorded as mulatto in early censuses and Black or "colored" in later records.

In the 1880 Federal census, Annetta and Edmond's household included Annetta's mother, Peggy Harris, whose name appears on her tombstone as Margrett Harris (ca. 1813-1888), born in Lynchburg, who is featured in several tintypes and in one albumen print in this collection. Peggy Harris's husband, Bucyrus Harris (1808-1867), is also buried with Peggy in Lynchburg's Old City Cemetery. Also in the 1880 household is a sister-in-law, Fanny "Brady" (Broadie or Brodie, a name also appearing in Fannie B. Rosser's name), probably Nettie's older sister.

Fannie B. Rosser moved to Durham, North Carolina in 1914 after an offer of employment from the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, where she worked for the next 32 years. She owned rental properties in both Durham and Lynchburg, and gave out personal loans to friends and family, especially during the Depression. She died in Lynchburg in 1973 and is buried in the Old City Cemetery next to several relatives.

Rosser was a foster mother to Mattie Douglas Burton of Durham, N.C., and was a guardian aunt to her brother Joseph's daughter, June Rosser. Mattie married Dr. Earl Randolph Meyers of Fresno, California in 1946; they had five children. Mattie Meyers became a leader in the Fresno chapter of the NAACP where she served as president for some time. June Rosser married Eugene Hudson Penick in 1961; they had at least three children. She remained financially dependent on her aunt until Rosser's death in 1973.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## **Administrative Information**

---

### **Publication Statement**

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

[askRL@duke.edu](mailto:askRL@duke.edu)

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

### **Access Restrictions**

Collection is open for research.

### **Use Restrictions**

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

### **Acquisition Information**

The Fannie B. Rosser Papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a gift in 1976 and 2012.

### **Processing Information**

Processed by Ginny Daley; Jennifer Morgan, January 1991.

Encoded by Joshua A. Kaiser.

Reprocessing and reparative description by Paula Jeannet, 2016, 2023.

Accession(s) described in this collection guide: 1976, 2012.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Names and Subjects

---

- African American families
- African American women -- California
- African American women -- North Carolina
- African American women -- Virginia
- African Americans -- Correspondence
- African Americans -- Housing -- North Carolina
- African Americans -- Housing -- Virginia
- African Americans -- Portraits
- African Americans -- Virginia
- Businesswomen
- Mothers and daughters
- Real estate management -- North Carolina
- Real estate management -- Virginia
- Self-employed women
- Campbell County (Va.) -- History
- Durham (N.C.) -- History
- Lynchburg (Va.) -- History
- Albumen prints
- Ambrotypes
- Black-and-white photographs
- Cabinet photographs
- Gelatin silver prints
- Tintypes (prints)
- Meyers, Mattie Burton

---

## Collection Inventory

---

### Papers, 1867-1973, 2012

Correspondence, 1909-1962

Box 1

#### Scope and Contents note

Correspondence in the collection concerns management of real estate properties in Durham, N.C. and Lynchburg, Va., and other business matters; personal correspondence with friends and family in Lynchburg, Virginia, Fresno, California, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Arranged chronologically.

---

Correspondence, 1963-1968 and undated

Box 2

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

- 
- Legal papers, 1895-1967 and undated Box 2
- Physical Description:** 1 folder
- Scope and Contents note**
- Deeds and assessments of property owned by Rosser in the 1920s to 1950s; stock certificates; codicils to Rosser's will; power of attorney notices from brothers James and Irvin; personal and property insurance forms; Irvin and Goldie Rosser's 1962 divorce papers. Arranged chronologically
- 
- Financial papers, 1867-1969 Box 2
- Physical Description:** 2 folders
- Scope and Contents note**
- Promissory note from John Oyler to B. Harris (perhaps Bucyrus Harris?), dated June 1867; loan forms from First National Bank to Rosser; loan forms from Rosser to other individuals; financial statements on Rosser and others; tax forms and receipts; lists of outstanding personal loans due Rosser as of 1966. Arranged chronologically.
- 
- Newspaper clippings, 1893-1961 and undated Box 2
- Physical Description:** 1 folder
- Scope and Contents note**
- Scattered articles and editorials on race relations; obituaries and wedding notices of family and friends. Arranged chronologically.
- 
- Printed materials, 1920-1973, 2012 Box 2
- Scope and Contents note**
- Church programs from St. Joseph's A.M.E. Church in Durham, 1960s; miscellaneous invitations; 1920 ballot list; program from black "Benevolent Order," undated; 1973 food stamp allotment form. Also includes a 2012 biography of Fannie Rosser's foster daughter, Mattie Meyers, A record of events regarding: Mattie Meyers a civil rights trailblazer, written by Sharon Revis-Green of Madera, California, Mattie Meyers's granddaughter.
- 
- Other papers and fragments, undated Box 2
- Physical Description:** 1 folder
- Scope and Contents note**
- Three essays (author unknown) on education, and one on "Training the Negro for Social Powers" ; speech notes for an honorary dinner for C.C. Spaulding; list of Rosser's instructions upon her death regarding the disposition of her

property in Lynchburg, Virginia, and her daughter, who was living there at the time. Most of these papers are typed but some are handwritten.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## **Photographs, circa 1873-1960**

**Physical Description:** .5 Linear Feet  
1 box; 10 folders 114 photographs

### **Scope and Contents note**

This collection of 114 photographs belonging to Fannie B. Rosser contains several tintypes and one ambrotype (early 1870s or perhaps late 1860s), cabinet cards, cartes-de-visites, and black-and-white and color snapshots (1870s-1950s); the subjects are chiefly Fannie Rosser's family and friends. Most earlier portraits are of unidentified African American individuals, and were taken by photographers in Lynchburg, Norfolk, and Richmond, Virginia, the Rosser and Harris families' home state. The family portraits indicate mixed-race descent on both sides of the family. Some portraits are enclosed by original paper or cardstock frames; one is enclosed in a souvenir restaurant photo holder.

Items of interest include an ambrotype of a girl, probably Fannie Rosser's mother, several tintypes of the same girl and Rosser's grandmother, circa 1873 or possibly earlier; portraits of Fannie Rosser from about 1889-1947; 19th century and early 20th century portraits of the Rosser family, and portraits of Durham African Americans J.C. Scarborough, Edward Merrick, Constance Watts Merrick as a baby, photojournalist Alexander M. Rivera, Jr., and physician William C. Strudwick. An early photograph, circa 1900, of a large group of well-dressed African American men and a baby girl posed outdoors may include North Carolina Mutual executives.

Photographs are arranged by family group or other subjects, then chronologically within.

Fannie B. Rosser, circa 1890-circa 1915

Box 3 > Folder 1

**Physical Description:** 10 photographs

### **Scope and Contents**

All are studio portraits of Fannie Rosser from about age 5 to about age 20. Formats include albumen prints in the form of cartes-de-visites and larger cabinet cards, mounted and unmounted gelatin silver prints, and one photo postcard. Two of the photographs appear to be Fannie's high school graduation pictures. In all of them, Fannie is dressed in fashionable clothing of the period.

Identified photographers and studios include A. H. Plecker, a well-known Civil War photographer, the Plecker & Maury studio, and the Edwards' Excelsior Photograph Gallery, all in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Fannie appears in many other photographs in other folders in the Photographs series, up to the late 1940s.

---

Peggy Harris (Margarett "Peggy" Harris, c. 1813-1888), circa 1873

Box 3 > Folder 2

### **Scope and Contents**

This large, faded albumen print, mounted on thin card stock, shows an elderly woman with light skin, seated in an ornate chair. She is identified on the back as Peggie Harris, or Margarett "Peggy" Harris, Fannie B. Rosser's grandmother. She appears to be dressed in widow's dress (her husband died in 1867). This same studio setting appears in an albumen print and tintype copy of Peggy Harris, seated in the same position, with a young woman standing by her side; in these darker-toned prints, she is wearing what may be mourning rings.

### **Biographical / Historical**

According to a few online Virginia birth and death records, Margarett "Peggy" Harris, or Peggie, as she was sometimes recorded, was born in Lynchburg city circa 1813, and died there in 1888. She is listed in the 1880 census as Edmond Burgess Rosser's 75 year old mother-in-law and is identified as mulatto; she is buried in the Old City Cemetery alongside her husband, Bucyrus Harris (1803-1867), of whom nothing else is currently known.

---

Peggie Harris and young woman, circa 1873

Box 3 > Folder 10

**Physical Description:** 2 photographs

### **Scope and Contents**

First item is a faded albumen print of an older woman in widow's dress, seated in an ornate chair, and wearing what appear to be mourning rings. She is identified on the back as Peggy Harris, Fannie B. Rosser's grandmother (c. 1813-1888), whose husband Bucyrus Harris died in 1867. With her is a young woman, standing with a hand on the older woman's shoulder, probably Fannie's mother Annetta ("Nettie") Harris Rosser, or perhaps a sister. An albumen photograph of the older woman, alone and in the exact same setting, is housed in a separate folder.

The second item is what appears to be a full-plate tintype copy print of the albumen image of the two women, also probably created in the early 1870s.

A portion of the oval card mount frame from the original albumen print is visible and there is some hand-tinting.

Though the dress and hairstyles in the original print seem to be from the 1860s, the original image apparently was taken in the early 1870s: the photographer's name appearing on the card mount is B.F. Troxler, 733 Fulton St., Brooklyn, who was at that address after 1873.

### **Biographical / Historical**

According to Virginia birth and death records, Margaret "Peggie" Harris was born in Lynchburg circa 1813, and died there in 1888. She is listed in the 1880 census as Edmond Burgess Rosser's 75 year old mother-in-law and is identified as mulatto; she is buried in the Old City Cemetery alongside her husband, Bucyris Harris (1803-1867), of whom nothing else is currently known.

According to Virginia birth and death records, Annetta "Nettie" Harris (1852-1894), Peggie's daughter, was born in Lynchburg and married Edmond Rosser in 1874; she passed away when Fannie was about 10. Her parents' Virginia marriage record indicates she was born in 1852 prior to their marriage, rather than 1856 as the 1880 census reports.

---

Group portrait of students and instructors, with  
Fannie B. Rosser in center, circa 1904

Box 3 > Folder 2  
Box 3 > Folder 10

**Physical Description:** 2 photographs

### **Scope and Contents**

The copy print, possibly early gelatin silver, shows a large unidentified group of African American male and female college-age students and adult instructors of both sexes, posing on the steps of a large unidentified building. The original albumen print is fragile and housed in folder 10.

---

Unidentified family members?, circa early  
1870s

Box 3 > Folder 3

**Physical Description:** 6 photographs 3 original photographs; 3 copy photographs

### **Scope and Contents**

The first item is a quarter-plate hand-tinted ambrotype (about 2 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches), taken about 1872, of a young very light-skinned woman in a fashionable and elaborate dress. She is the same young woman who appears in the albumen studio portrait of Peggie Harris, circa 1874. She is probably Annetta "Nettie" Harris Rosser, Fannie Rosser's mother. There are three color use copies of this ambrotype in the same folder.

The two tintypes are of an unidentified adult man of color, possibly Edmond B. Rosser around age 25-30, and of an unidentified woman of color, possibly his second wife Callie Higginbotham as a young woman.

Given their dress and the age of the images, these individuals are thought to have come from families who were free before the Civil War.

---

Unidentified family members?, circa early  
1870s-1920s

Box 3 > Folder 4

**Physical Description:** 8 photographs

**Scope and Contents**

These eight studio portraits show fashionably dressed children and adults of color, possibly mixed-race; many are likely to be relatives of Fannie Rosser. Most are mounted albumen prints dating from the 1870s to the 1880s, mounted on card stock in cartes-de-visite and larger cabinet card sizes. There is also one photographic postcard from around 1920. Some items are stamped or embossed with the photographer's name.

Photographers, when identified, include: Edwards Excelsior Gallery, 804 Main St., Lynchburg, Va., 1880s; Kuebler, 1210 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa., after 1892; A.M. Turner, Norfolk, Va., circa 1870s; A. M Plecker and Plecker & Maury, Lynchburg, 1880s; and Jefferson's Art Gallery, 5234 E. Broad St., Richmond, Va., after 1895 (African American studio).

---

"James" [James Boyd Rosser?], circa 1915

Box 3 > Folder 5

**Scope and Contents**

This half-length portrait is of a well-dressed unidentified young African American man, circa 1920, with an inscription on the back that reads, "From your Brother James... to sister Hattie Givens / address 1746 S St. NW, Washington DC." The sitter appears to be too old to be Fannie B. Rosser's brother James Boyd Rosser, who was born in 1904. The photographer is Leo Weintrob (aka Weintraub), 1717 1/2 Atlantic City Ave., Atlantic City, New Jersey (active late 1880s-1920s).

The portrait was removed from its broken cardstock oval frame and sleeved separately.

---

Identified and unidentified friends and others,  
circa 1900-circa 1930

Box 3 > Folder 6

**Physical Description:** 11 photographs

**Scope and Contents**

This group of ten studio portraits and one group photograph features African American friends and acquaintances of Fannie B. Rosser, chiefly men from

Durham, N.C. The majority are unmounted gelatin silver prints measuring between 5x7 and 8x10 inches. The few photographers whose names are present include: The Talley Studio (run in 1919 by Miss Laura Talley, later Laura Sessoms), 209 W. Main St., Durham, N.C.; and Wither's & [illegible] (William C. Withers), 814 Chestnut St., Philadelphia. An early photograph, circa 1900, of a large group of well-dressed African American men and a baby girl posing outdoors may include North Carolina Mutual executives.

Individuals of note identified in original captions or by library staff include: J.C. Scarborough (John Clarence Scarborough, Sr., 1878-1972), funeral director and mortician, philanthropist, born in Kinston and resident of Durham; Charles Haddon Shepard (1878-1935), physician and surgeon, resident of Durham, and brother of James E. Shepard, founder of North Carolina Central University; and a "Wm" or "Wr" Strudwick, either Warren J. Strudwick, Sr., born 1923 in Durham to Mabel and Dr. William C. Strudwick, or his older brother, William W., born in 1915; Alexander M. Rivera, photojournalist (b. 1913) and civil rights activist in Durham, c. 1933; a "Merrick," probably Edward Richard Merrick (1888-1967), N.C. Mutual Insurance Company officer, circa 1918; and a separate portrait of Merrick's daughter, Constance Merrick Watts (1920-2015), at about two years old.

---

Fannie B. Rosser, family, and friends, circa  
1910-circa 1956

Box 3 > Folder 7

**Physical Description:** 53 photographs

**Scope and Contents**

Folder houses gelatin silver prints, chiefly small snapshots of an informal nature, of Fannie B. Rosser and her family, friends, and other individuals, many of them posing in front of houses and with cars; the images date from about the 1910s to sometime after 1956. Some are captioned with names and a few have dates. The majority of the later photographs were taken in Durham, N.C.; earlier locations are unidentified. Fannie Rosser appears in many of these images, from her college-age years, posing with a small group of young women, to her late adulthood, attending Mattie Burton's wedding to Earl Meyers in 1947. There is one photograph identified as Joseph I. Rosser, Fannie's brother, as a young man; there are other family members in the earlier images who are unidentified, including one which appears to be Fannie and her stepmother and father.

---

Mattie Douglas Burton Meyers and Fannie B.  
Rosser, 1930s-1970s

Box 3 > Folder 8

**Physical Description:** 14 items  
13 photographs; 1 paper souvenir photo holder

### **Scope and Contents**

These black-and-white studio portraits and snapshots center around Mattie Burton Douglas Meyers, and her family, who were very close to Fannie Rosser. All are gelatin silver prints and date from Mattie's young adult years to images of her as a young mother. Most were likely taken in Durham, N.C., but locations are not always recorded. Fannie Rosser appears in later photographs of Mattie's wedding in 1947. Also present in the folder is a souvenir photo holder from a restaurant in Los Angeles, Clifton's, enclosing a photograph of Mattie and Earl. There are also two photographs of jazz bands, one unidentified and one of the Duces of Rhythm taken in Philadelphia. Additional snapshots of Mattie's husband Earl Meyers, Sr., are located in a separate folder as originally organized.

### **Biographical Note**

Longtime educator, author, and civil rights activist, Mattie Douglas Burton Meyers was born in Durham, N.C. in 1925 to Fred Langston and Julia Tedder Burton, and died in 2017 in Fresno, California. Fannie B. Rosser was a central figure in Mattie's life, paying for her college education. Mattie Burton married Earl Meyers in 1947 and they later moved to California.

---

Earl Randolph Meyers, Sr. and children Earl Jr.,  
Eric, and Gayle Meyers, 1950s-1960s

Box 3 > Folder 9

**Physical Description:** 6 photographs

### **Scope and Contents**

Folder houses a small group of snapshots, some in color, of Earl Meyers, Sr., husband of Fannie B. Rosser's foster daughter, Mattie Douglas Burton Meyer, and his young children. Most were taken outside their house in Durham, N.C. Earl and Mattie Meyers eventually had five children.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)