

## **Guide to the Club Essence Collection**

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See also Club Essence Photograph Collection FBO-0123.1-.672

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### COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

According to their history, “Club Essence was founded in 1973 in response to a need to establish more social and civic activities for Black women in the Ithaca area” with the goal to promote unity, fellowship and support for them. Founding members were Bernice Jones, Helen Garcia, Mary Turner, Pauline Darrett, Pauline Stout, Lenora Richardson, Barbara Robinson, Martha Mc Peak, Jennie Graham, and Annie Magee. They were involved in numerous ways in the local community from their start, and joined the City Federation of Women’s Organizations in 1975.

According to their early records, their primary concern was “to interact with the youth of the community in an attempt to promote their self-esteem while urging them to develop their minds through education and to encourage vocational aspirations for those who do not choose college after high school.” They sponsored activities and parties for kids as young as 6-11 years old, and dances for teens. They funded sports camps for needy kids. One notable initiative was their Presentation Balls; these formal gatherings gave young people a taste of glamor and excitement uncommon to most teen gatherings. They held multiple fundraisers throughout the years to support their most important initiative: scholarships for Ithaca High School seniors. These awards for deserving Black and Brown students were based on social contributions to the community as well as academic achievement. They were often funded by one of Club Essence’s trademark programs – the International Food Feasts. These large annual gatherings were the results of multiple donations of food by members and attended by many people from the wider community. Other generous activities included teas for senior citizens and contributions to needy members of the local community, including the Displaced Homemakers Minority Advocacy Organization.

In a 1999 interview with the Ithaca Journal, then club secretary Glenda R. Walker said, “I would describe Club Essence more as a family than an organization.”

This collection contains almost thirty years' worth of organizational records, including correspondence, by-laws and history, program brochures, and extensive meeting minutes.

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