



BHC-MSS 0227

## Guide to the Records of Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc.

By Meg Rinn and E. Van Tuyl

May 2022

### **Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc.

**Title:** Records of Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc.

**Dates:** 1999-present

**Quantity:** 1 document box

**Abstract:** Juneteenth is the celebration of the enforcement of the emancipation proclamation in the state of Texas starting on June 19, 1865. Although the holiday has not always been widely discussed in the general population, Americans from across the country have celebrated Juneteenth since 1866. The small collection comes from a local organization that was founded in Bridgeport and is now focused on county-wide participation. It contains a variety of items that reflect the goals and activities of *Juneteenth of Fairfield County, Inc.* There are artifacts such as flags and banners, paper-based items like award certificates and proclamations, and photographs. Founder Cynthia Griffin provided a statement detailing the history of the organization and her reasons for developing it in 2024.

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Bridgeport History Center

### **Biographical and Administrative History:**

Juneteenth is the celebration of the enforcement of the emancipation proclamation in the state of Texas starting on June 19, 1865. While the emancipation proclamation was signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, compliance with the law was slow and haphazard. It is worth noting that full enforcement of the proclamation did not mark the true end of slavery in states and it took concentrated military efforts to ensure the freedom of enslaved people, the date itself remained a part of cultural memory and endured as a day to celebrate Black culture in the United States.

Juneteenth celebrations are documented starting on June 19, 1866. Since then, the holiday has evolved its own traditions, cultural markers, and taken on the local character of the communities that celebrate it. From the 1960s onwards, celebration in America has spread. A concentrated effort to make it into a recognized holiday started in 1979 in the state of Texas, where it was passed quickly. This level of recognition stayed small until the 2010s, when a greater discussion about race and racial justice in America brought the holiday and significance of Juneteenth to the attention of white America. 2021 saw Juneteenth's status elevated to that of a federal holiday and signed into law by President Joe Biden. Representative Barbara-Rose Collins started the effort to declare Juneteenth a holiday in 1996.

Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc. represents the Bridgeport and greater Fairfield County area's celebration of Black culture and runs Juneteenth programming for the area, reflecting the character

and history of the local community. It was founded in 1992 by Cynthia Griffin. Annual events include a Gala and awards ceremonies and a parade. There have been several changes to the name over the years; it is currently (2022) called the *Juneteenth Parade and Harambee Festival*.

Founder Cynthia Griffin was born in Baltimore, grew up in Concord, North Carolina, then moved to Philadelphia, then to Bridgeport where her father was living in the 1960s. She has lived in the Bridgeport/Stratford area ever since. She worked for Remington Arms as a time clerk until they moved. She then became a nail artist and worked at Rashad Ramir salon. While working as a nail artist, she was inspired to form and promote Bridgeport's Juneteenth festivities. She learned about Juneteenth while working at the salon and read an article about the topic from a publication put out by the Wadsworth Athenaeum. It sparked her interest and she wanted to do something to celebrate in Bridgeport. She and fellow community members would meet in the salon and plan there. Griffin worked with Joe Wilkins on the 4th of July parade where Cynthia had offered her time and that gave her the experience to take on Juneteenth. Griffin and her group started out small, lining up on Beardsley Street and moving up to Newfield to Stratford Avenue and then to the end of Stratford Avenue, then Connecticut Avenue. According to Griffin, it was "a long parade," but everyone had fun. The organizers' goal was to instill pride and dignity in the Black population of Bridgeport.

In the early years spreading the word about the Juneteenth parade was a challenge because very few people had heard of it. Once informed, people got involved quickly and embraced it. Griffin and her crew got word out via flyers, telephone, word of mouth, and one year there was an ad in the "Connecticut Post." Talking to people in person and using social networks was a huge way of getting the word out. Speaking to members of the many local churches also helped.

The original name of the organization was "Juneteenth Committee." Yolanda Ortiz changed name to *Juneteenth of Fairfield County*. It is unclear exactly when the name was changed. Participants, named a Parade Marshall from each city (originally Bridgeport, Shelton, Norwalk, Stamford, Trumbull, Stratford) The celebration is now simply the *Juneteenth Parade and Festival*. The route for the parade has changed over the years.

By June 19<sup>th</sup> of 2021, the celebration was conducted entirely in Seaside Park in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and was generally a good experience. There were 80 vendors and 75 entrants in the parade itself. Also, this was around the time of federalization of the holiday and in the aftermath of COVID. Willie McBride was Grand Marshall and Bridgeport's own, actor Michael J. White, joined the parade as well. Activities surrounding the Juneteenth celebration include fundraising and events for children and teens.

**Scope and Content note:**

The collection is small, but contains a variety of items that reflect the goals and activities of *Juneteenth of Fairfield County, Inc.* There are artifacts such as flags and banners, paper-based items like award certificates and proclamations, and photographs. Founder Cynthia Griffin provided a statement detailing the history of the organization and her reasons for developing it.

**Arrangement note:**

As of 2025, the collection has not been divided into separate series, but this could change if the organization makes further donations. Box 1 contains textile based materials such as flags a scarf, and banners. Box 2 has photographs and awards and Box 3 includes clippings, a commemorative magnet, and a citation.

**Administrative information:**

**Provenance:** Cynthia Griffin, founder

**Related Materials:**

Oral history with *Juneteenth of Fairfield County, Inc.* founder Cynthia Griffin, recorded on April 20, 2022. Found in the BHC's general oral history collection, **BHC-ORH 00003** and online on the BHC website.

**Preferred Citation:**

Records of *Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc.* (BHC-MSS 0227), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

**Names and Subject Tracings***Personal names*

Griffin, Cynthia

Mintz, George

*Corporate names*

Juneteenth of Fairfield County Inc.

*Subject tracings*

Juneteenth

**Detailed box/folder listing**

## Box 1

1. Parade scarf reading "Juneteenth 2004"
2. Parade t-shirt, June 21, 2003
3. Pan-African flag, undated
4. Juneteenth flag, c. 2007-2010s

## Box 2

1. List of Grand Marshalls, 1999-2001
2. Photographs, Juneteenth parade, June 12, 1999
3. Juneteenth pageant program, March 31, 2007
4. Community Service Awards Gala program, 2019
5. Annual Grand Marshal and Community Service Awards reception, June 2021
6. Proclamation of Juneteenth Day from City of Bridgeport, June 8, 2013
7. Official statement for Juneteenth Bridgeport Parade Day from State of Connecticut, June 21, 2003

## Box 3

1. Parade car magnet, undated
2. State of Connecticut General Assembly Official Citation in Honor of Cynthia Griffin, March 2008
3. Clippings, *Bridgeport Post*

## **Accrual, 2024**

### **Box 2**

8. Document: Juneteenth of Fairfield County: "The History – the Past, the Present, the Future"  
by Cynthia H. Griffin, Founder
9. Flyer: "Congratulations Juneteenth of Fairfield County – Cynthia Griffin pictured.