

Levi J. Rowan Photograph Collection



Rowan Family

The Levi J. Rowan Photograph Collection at the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center for the Study of the 20th Century African American at Jackson State University comprises black-and-white photographs, depicting individuals, families, groups, office scenes, and special programs and events. Dating to the 1890s, they detail the stories of middle- and upper-class African Americans in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Due to the systematic disfranchisement and establishment of segregation in the region during this period, the black elite comprised a small part of the population, making these pictures a rare find. Still, they indicate the persistence of African Americans despite the ravages of Jim Crow society in the South and show the long history of the black middle-class in America, which did not simply appear out of thin air in the 1960s. Instead, these people provided a power base that was essential to the success of the modern civil rights movement and to growing access for African Americans to the ranks of the middle-class. The collection also tells the story of early professional photography—one of the few career paths that was open, even if on a limited basis, to blacks in the South at the turn of the 20th Century.

Levi John Rowan and Mattie Foote Rowan



Levi J. Rowan (1871-1934), an 1893 Alcorn graduate and native of Rodney, Mississippi, became the first alumnus to serve as president of his alma mater in 1905. He was the son of Sidney and Martha (Walker) Rowan and married Mattie Foote on July 29, 1896. They had four daughters: Ruth Inez, Mattie Hermione, Pearl Bernice, and Thelma Bee.

Prior to his selection as an English teacher at Alcorn, Rowan taught five years in the public schools near his hometown of Rodney and was hired as an English instructor at Alcorn A&M College in 1889. He was later promoted to Professor of English as well as secretary and bookkeeper. In 1921, he was elected president of the American Teachers Association.

Rowan served as the Alcorn president until 1911 and was re-elected president in 1914, serving until his death on June 28, 1934. He presided over the most ambitious expansion of facilities and student body growth in Alcorn's early history.

Mattie Foote Rowan, Lizzie W. Coleman, and Ursula J. Wade Foster organized the Mississippi Federation of Colored Women Clubs in 1903, and Mrs. Rowan was the first secretary and served as the state president from 1909-1912. She was also the Federation's corresponding secretary; financial secretary; member of the Federation's Board of Directors; and editor of the young people's department in the official organ of the Federation, *The Herald*. She spent eight years as a state organizer and was the first to organize a junior club known as the Chain of Friendship. For years she was known as the leading force in club work not only on Alcorn's campus but in the broader community as well.