

## University Archives, Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University

Free Man of Color, 2004

In 1824 John Newton Templeton, a freed slave, came to Ohio University under the guidance of university president Reverend Robert Wilson. As the first African American to attend the university, Templeton had to live with the Wilsons and serve as their student servant because many of the students refused to live under the same roof as him. He remained with the Wilsons for four years and earned his board by performing odd jobs around the house. Ohio University professor Charles Smith wrote *Free Man of Color*, a play devoted to Templeton's years at Ohio University for the school's bicentennial in 2004. The play focuses on the student's relationship with both Wilson and his wife Jane during his time at the university. Wilson and Templeton have many discussions about politics in the play, and Reverend Wilson expresses his belief that Templeton was the man God had chosen to govern the newly formed country of Liberia, which he and other members of the American Colonization Society felt that African Americans should live. Jane shows her distaste for Templeton throughout the majority of the play, displaying her resentment that a former slave has the opportunity to earn a college degree while she, the wife of the university president, is not even allowed to enter.

The collection contains a number of materials that deal with the play's production, specifically in Chicago, where it was originally released. Among the materials included are programs from the theater company, a newspaper about Chicago theater and the opening night of *Free Man of Color*, as well as a newsletter featuring the play. The newsletter is one of the most informative pieces of the collection, as it provides a great deal of background information about Templeton and the Wilsons, as well as what student life at the university was like at the time. Also of interest is the production script and a taped copy of a February, 2004 performance. Because the collection is new, the materials are in excellent condition, and have been placed in one Hollinger box.