



NYCPM

New York College of Podiatric Medicine

Office of Bertha Williams, M.Cp. ('31) Provides Glimpse of NYCPM's Past



A July telephone call to Thomas Walker, NYCPM's Director of Library Services, has unexpectedly opened a window onto a world with a historic link to the College.

The long-empty brownstone in West Harlem in which Dr. Bertha Williams, a podiatrist, had lived and worked had been recently purchased. The buyer knew there was a connection to the New York College of Podiatric Medicine from an article in the *New York Age**, and was willing to let Mr. Walker visit to see if there were any books or furnishings that might be of interest to the school.

Dr. Williams was a member of the NYCPM class of 1931, and according to an article about her graduation in *The New York Age* of June 13, 1931, she was the only African-American student in her class. The same article states that Dr. Williams had been raised nearby by her uncle, himself a podiatrist, and she entered the First Institute of Podiatry (as the College was called then) after working in her uncle's office for three years after graduating from high school. (*The New York Age* was a newspaper published in Harlem until 1960.)

The 1931 *Fiopian*, the yearbook for her class, notes that Dr. Williams had made a "tour" of England, Scotland, France and Germany and had submitted an article to her class newspaper, *Footprints*, in which she gave her perspective on podiatry in Europe. According to *The New York Age* article, she had accompanied her uncle, Dr. J. R. Hillery, as he attended conferences in those countries and gave demonstrations, in which she assisted (before she entered the Institute).

We know little of Dr. Williams' life and work post-graduation, except that she died in the early 2000s, when she would have been in her 90s, according to papers found in her office. Under the direction of Michael J. Trepal, DPM, NYCPM's Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, Mr. Walker selected several furnishings from her office that will be put on view in or around the library in the near future.