

Arturo Schomburg

May 1987 Calendar

In response to a teacher's remark that African Americans had no history, Arturo Schomburg began lifelong research on the subject, and developed one of the world's most extensive collections of books, pamphlets, periodicals, photographs, prints and historical documents by and about people of African descent, most notably the Americas and Caribbean. Now housed in Harlem, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is recognized internationally as a leading institution in its field.

Born in Puerto Rico, Schomburg moved to New York at age 17 where he put his research skills to work as a clerk-messenger for a law firm, and subsequently began a long and successful career at Banker's Trust Company, where he became head of the bank's foreign mail section. He continued his passion for researching African American history and culture, and in 1911, he cofounded the Negro Society for Historical Research.

Schomburg traveled to Europe and the Caribbean to collect historical facts and documents. He also uncovered many treasures in the United States, including a portrait of African American astronomer and mathematician Benjamin Bannecker, who helped lay out the blueprint for the



development of Washington, D.C. and a manuscript by Lemuel Haynes, the African American pastor of a white New England church. Schomburg, who authored several articles about the African American experience, also compiled the first collection of Phillis Wheatley's poems.

In 1926, a \$10,000 grant by the Carnegie Corporation enabled the New York Public Library to acquire Schomburg's extensive collection. In 1928, he received the William E. Harmon Award for distinguished achievement. Schomburg was named curator of the library's division of Negro Literature, History and Prints in 1932. He died in 1938, and later the division was renamed the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History. In 1972, it became the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a research division of the New York Public Library.