There were hundreds of letters from DAR members and the public of both protest and support of the National Society’s decision to not let Marian Anderson sing in Constitution Hall because of a “White Artist Only” clause in the contracts. These are a sampling of some letters sent to DAR National Headquarters in 1939 by DAR members disagreeing with the National Society’s actions.
Daughters of American Revolution
Constitution Hall
Washington, D.C.

Daughters of American Revolutionary
Washington, D.C.

WESTERN UNION

PRESIDENT GENERAL MEMORIAL CONTINENTAL HALL WASHDC

AS A DAUGHTER OF A CIVIL WAR VETERAN AND A FORMER REGENT I AM PROTESTING AGAINST THE BARRING OF MARIAN ANDERSON FROM OUR HALL=

ELIZABETH S JACKSON.
National Board of Management, N.S.D.A.R.,
Memorial Continental Hall,
Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Henry Robert, Jr., President General

Dear Maedames:

The Gogebic Chapter, N. S. D. A. R. of Ironwood, Mich., wish to express their strong censure of and to the National Board of Management in refusing the use of Constitution Hall to a negro singer.

The fact alone that this singer has been heard in many southern cities as an artist of merit should have weighted your decision differently, but your action is especially inconceivable to us, for it should be no news to any of the national board or local management that the present national administration has played hard for the colored vote and will do anything to cater to it, and that the D. A. R., with its previously labeled "reactionaryism" etc., would make the best possible "cause celebre" by such a refusal.

We resent the opprobrium brought upon us as an organization by this action; we believe that the rank and file of the members of our organization are neither reactionary nor autocratic; we find that already this blunder has influenced many desirable eligibles from membership; and we feel that the board of management should take more cognizance of liberal viewpoints and should certainly be more alert to unfavorable publicity angles than evidenced recently and in the past.

No other leading women's organization has such talent for bad headlines; it is time something was changed and done about it.

Far more and inestimable damage has been done to our organization by this wide and disproportionate, and, in some respects, unfair publicity given us than would have occurred if a few southern members had been forced to see some negroes in the D. A. R. auditorium for one evening.

Yours very truly,

GOGEBIC CHAPTER, N.S.D.A.R.

Mary Robie Branch, Secretary
June 29, 1939

Mrs. Henry M. Robert, Jr.,
President General,
National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution,
Memorial Continental Hall,
Washington, D.C.

My dear Mrs. Robert:

According to your request of May 1st, I read the excerpt of your report as President-General which states the position of the Society in regard to the rules of renting Constitution Hall, and I also read the editorial from the Washington Post. The members of my Chapter are anxious to have individual copies of these two articles. We have a small membership and I am wondering whether it is possible for us to have 42 copies. If so, we shall be very glad to pay for them or to send the postage, or to do whatever is necessary and right.

This middle western section of the country has been more sympathetic toward Miss Anderson than to the stand of the National Board, although their devotion to our State Regent Mrs. Bennison, has made it possible for us to quiet articulate antagonism. In view of the feeling under the surface, however, it would be high desirable if a rather general distribution of these two articles could be made to members.

Thanking you very much for anything that you can do,

I am

Sincerely yours,

[Signed]

[Signature]

Regent
Mrs. Henry M. Roberts, Jr.
President-general, Daughters of American Revolution
Memorial Continental Hall
17 and D Streets N.W.
Washington, D.C.

My dear Mrs. Roberts:

Because I am chairman of the Good Citizenship Committee of the St. Cloud chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, I have been called upon to defend our society for its action in refusing the Society's hall for a concert to be given by Marian Anderson, negro soloist.

I realize that the Society has a right to use its own property as it sees fit. I also know that there is racial segregation in Washington, D.C. and that the Society must abide by the rules of the District of Columbia.

However, The Daughters of the American Revolution are urging the teaching of good citizenship and of real American principles which do not permit intolerance of any kind. Moreover, Miss Anderson is a splendid example of what a negro can do when these principles are present. Marian Anderson is not just a negro; she is an artist.

Therefore, it seems to me that, even in Washington, an exception could be made in the case of an artist, black or white. Surely white persons in Washington D.C. would attend a concert given by Marian Anderson. If the negroes were kept out because of the Districts' rules, surely no logical objection can be raised.

All the newspapers and the radio have quoted you as saying that Constitution Hall was already engaged by another musical organization for Easter Sunday; also that the rules governing the uses of the Hall are in accordance with the policy of the District of Columbia; also that the artistic and musical standing of Miss Anderson is not involved. Then the comment which follows indicates that the general public does not believe this to be the whole truth.

My chief purpose in taking your valuable time is to secure "Ammunition" with which to fight our critics. I think I could win if I had an answer to the following question: "Would Marian Anderson have been refused the privilege of giving a concert in the D.A.R. hall either Easter Sunday afternoon or Easter Sunday evening, if she had been an artist of other than negro blood and if the hall had
already been rented for one part of that same day?"

May I have a definite answer from you regarding this matter?

Yours, for a glorious America,

[Handwritten Signature]

(Miss) Gertrude B. Gove
Chairman of the Good Citizenship Committee
St. Cloud Chapter of the Daughters of American Revolution
469 West Avenue, Norwalk, Connecticut

Mrs. Henry M. Robert, Pres. General, N.S.D.A.R.

Memorial Continental Hall, Washington, D.C.

Dear Madam President—General:-

As a member for forty-six years of the Society I wish to join my protest to those of many others against the actions of some individuals or committee which has put our Society so terribly in the wrong.

I refer, of course, to the refusal of the use of Constitution Hall for a concert to one who is acknowledged by many competent authorities to be the greatest singer of to-day—a refusal based on her race! And this too, in a year when the first project stated in "What the Daughters Do" is encouragement and development of acquaintance with native American music!

The Daughters of the American Revolution is a patriotic society, supposedly loyal to the principles of our country, foremost among which are "all men are created free and equal"—"without discrimination because of race, color,..." and the majority of the Daughters, doubtless, acknowledge the Christian religion and our Bible where we read "God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth." How can we take such action as has been done in our name and not be party to a great wrong and a denial of our principles?

I joined the Society in 1852 when my mother organized the Norwalk Chapter, the 4th in Connecticut and, while remaining a member of my own Chapter, I have just helped my youngest sister to organize the newest one in Connecticut, the Joel Barlow Chapter of Reeding, named in honor of a son of Reading (and our gr.gr.gr uncle) who was one of the great apostles of liberty, peace and democracy.

I do not want to be forced to give up my loyalty to the Society be-
cause of its disloyalty to and denial of the principles for which it should stand, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, but it is most mortifying to be obliged to apologize for and try to explain away (as I have had to do in many times) actions which are entirely out of harmony with the spirit upon which the organization was founded.

I know how strong that racial prejudice is in some people and in many parts of the country but we should do all in our power to diminish it rather than act so as to deepen it. How can we criticize the treatment being meted out to Jews in other countries when we are a party to such racial discriminations here?

There have been some feeble excuses and evasions reported in the newspapers and on the radio but I have heard nothing authoritative—perhaps you have made a statement but if so I have missed it. It seems to me that you, as head of the Society should state where the Society stands officially in this matter that those of us who do not approve of the action—and we are not a small number—may know whether we have been put in a false position by an unofficial action or whether there is some regulation which must be corrected, in the interested of Christianity and Patriotism.

Yours, for the honor of the Daughters,

Clara Roosevelt Hill
Mrs. Henry B. Robert  
National Society of D.A.R.  
Constitution Hall  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mrs. Robert:

May I ask for the facts in regard to the denial of the use of Constitution Hall to Marion Anderson? We, in the recently organized Joel Barlow Chapter of Redding, Connecticut, find ourselves the object of ridicule. Joel Barlow was an outstanding libertarian in our American Revolution and during the years thereafter, which he spent in England, France, Tripoli and at his estate, Kalorama, in Washington. On the 24th of March, we are having 100 guests at breakfast in the Federated Church of Redding, Connecticut and a public meeting in the church, which will be attended by the public school children of the town and their parents, all in celebration of the 175th anniversary of his birth. In the midst of preparations for honoring Joel Barlow and his democratic ideals, we are confronted by publicity, which indicates that some national committee of our society is constrained to violate those ideals in present day practice.

Having resided in Washington more or less continually since Cleveland's adminis-
tration, when my father went to Congress to remain for 22 years, I am familiar with the race problem in the District of Columbia, but I did not think that it would extend to the field of art and music by decision of the D.A.R., since, I attended the National Folk Festival in Constitution Hall as the guest of my cousin, Professor Martha Beckwith, of Vassar College. Negro singers appeared there upon the platform now denied, according to press reports, to Marion Anderson.

I am the more astonished at the reported decision in that this year, for the first time, there has been a National Committee for the promotion of American music. Marion Anderson is either American music or African, and I think that by the constitution, for which our hall is named, we are obliged to recognize her as an American citizen. Possibly her ancestors also served in the American Revolution.

As Regent of the Redding Chapter, I shall be grateful for a statement of the terms regarding the lease of Constitution Hall, for there has been a statement, since this publicity came out, that there is a provision in the lease that the hall can never be rented to or for Negroes. If this is true, I think that it should be changed at the next Congress. If it is not true, I think that the committee, in
charge of rentals of Constitution Hall, should be instructed by the National Society to lease without discrimination on account of race, religion, sex, or marital status.

Discretion and judgment are always presumed to be used by such a committee, but Roland Hayes, Robson, and Marion Anderson would not be refused, if judgment and discretion were properly used.

Mrs. Roosevelt’s official position compels her to resign from the D.A.R. Under the reported circumstances, her continued membership would justify the severest attacks upon American inconsistency from those in Europe who are, at the present, most severely criticised by Americans. I am not resigning from the D.A.R., which my mother helped to found, but I can think of few acts by the D.A.R. themselves which would so destroy the usefulness of the Society in the whole United States as the reported action of denying the lease of the Hall, on account of the race and color of a great artist produced in the United States.

Germany would deny Heifetz a public hearing. Will the Silver Shirts of America induce the denial of Constitution Hall for him in future seasons?
Please have the facts sent to me.

Thanking you, I am

Sincerely yours,

Elsie M. Hill

EMH: FE
President General of the D.A.R. Constitution Hall, Washington:

Dear Madam President:

I hope that I am one of many members of the D.A.R. who are protesting against the decision of not allowing Marian Anderson to sing in Constitution Hall.

I have been a life member of the D.A.R. for over thirty-five years, some of my family come from the South, and I am a decided anti-Roosevelt person.

For the first time, I am very
much ashamed of being a member of this organization which by refusing this great singer an appearance in the Hall has shown such abysmal ignorance that it is appalling. Despite many hardships and handicaps, Miss Anderson has made good to such an extent that she is recognized as being one of our greatest American singers, and the D.A.R. of all organizations should have been proud to have had her appear in the Hall. Instead they have shown intolerance and such
an un-American attitude that they will never be able to live down. I am very glad that Mrs. Roosevelt by resigning has made their attitude public, and we deserve all the censure which we certainly are getting. We who should stand for some degree of culture have shown only intolerance.

I served on the Board of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the D.A.R. at the time Constitutional Hall was being built, and we were
interested in the furnishing. So I feel very keenly the disgrace which we have earned.

The educational work which we do in the schools is splendid, but now I feel that it should be suspended until our own members receive education in not only appreciation of the arts, but making good Americans. I have heard nothing but condemnation from every one, and I consider that we have been actually cruel, so that for the first time I am very much
ashamed of being a member of what those in power have made of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Very truly,

Elizabeth Burt Swallow

March 9, 1939.