



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Alberta Hunter papers

1914-1987

Sc MG 329

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

Summary

Creator: Hunter, Alberta

Title: Alberta Hunter papers

Date: 1914-1987

Size: 8.67 linear feet (24 boxes)

Source: Gift of Gerald Cook, 1988.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Alberta Hunter was a blues singer who toured the world and sang leading roles on Broadway. The Alberta Hunter papers consist of personal and professional papers documenting Hunter's singing and nursing careers.

Conditions Governing Access:

Lyrics may not be handcopied or photocopied. Music may be handcopied or photocopied only through written permission of the publisher and/or executor of the Hunter estate.

Preferred citation: [Item], Alberta Hunter papers, Sc MG 329, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Accessioned by Mary Yearwood, June 1988.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: artwork.

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

Blues singer Alberta Hunter debuted in 1912 in Chicago, at age fifteen; she toured throughout the world and sang leading roles in Europe and on Broadway. Born in 1895 in Memphis, Tennessee, Hunter appeared in top Chicago nightclubs, including the Dreamland Cafe, where she shared the spotlight with the King Oliver Band. In 1921, Hunter made her first recording on the Black Swan label with her own song, "Down Hearted Blues". She replaced Bessie Smith in the leading role of the musical, *How Come?*, and shortly thereafter she toured in Europe, where she landed the leading role in the London production of *Showboat* (1927) with Paul Robeson. This event marked the beginning of a very successful European career which encompassed recordings as well as a role in England's first color film, *Radio Parade of 1935*. Hunter made her home in England and France and developed a sophisticated cabaret act, which toured throughout Europe and the Middle East.

With the advent of World War II, Hunter returned to the United States and volunteered to headline a 1945 United Service Organizations (USO) tour to Europe, Japan, and Korea. After appearances in a 1954 revival of *Mamba's Daughters* with Ethel Waters, and the unsuccessful production of *Mrs. Patterson*, starring Eartha Kitt, Hunter retired from the entertainment field.

In 1955, at the age of 60, she began working as a volunteer at the Joint Diseases Hospital in Harlem; she then embarked on her second career as a practical nurse at the Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island in New York City, where she worked for twenty years before retiring.

Hunter returned to music in 1977, in her eighties, and again recorded extensively, appeared on radio and television programs, sang on film tracts, filled long engagements in New York nightclubs, and travelled to Paris, London, and Brazil. Alberta Hunter died in 1984, six months before her ninetieth birthday.

Scope and Content Note

The Alberta Hunter papers consist of personal and professional papers documenting Hunter's singing and nursing careers. Her personal papers consist of reminiscences, family correspondence (1964-1985), personal correspondence (1924-1985), passports, financial records, and address books. Hunter's singing career is documented by correspondence with Ethel Waters, Eubie Blake, and blues pianist Lovie Austin, with whom Hunter recorded in her early years. The soundtrack album from the film, *Remember My Name*, featuring Alberta Hunter, is represented by correspondence and songs. There are contracts for performances, recordings, publication of her songs, television, and radio; royalties; and copyright registration. Her popularity is documented by fan mail (1937-1984). The collection also contains a large body of holograph lyrics by Hunter in addition to some manuscript music by Hunter and other composers, such as Eubie Blake. There are programs and broadsides (1931-1985), printed material, lists of Hunter's unpublished and published songs, notes on issues and sales of her recordings, and schedules of performances. Abundant news clippings discuss her singing career (1924-1986). One of two scrapbooks provides information on her activities of the early 1920s as well as her European career in general; USO Camp Show tours; her 1930s NBC radio series; and her appearances with Ethel Waters in the 1954 revival of *Mamba's Daughters*. Another scrapbook is devoted to the 1923 musical revue *How Come?* in which Hunter appeared at both the Apollo and Lafayette Theaters. Her twenty-year career as a licensed practical nurse is represented by her school examination papers and several notebooks. There is also a folder of research material used by Frank

Taylor for his 1987 book, *Alberta Hunter: A Celebration in Blues*.

Arrangement: Organized into three series: I. Personal; II. Professional-singing career; and III. Professional-nursing career.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American actresses
African American nurses
African American women entertainers
African American women singers
African Americans in medicine
African Americans in the performing arts
Blues musicians

Names

Austin, Lovie
Blake, Eubie, 1887-1983
Hunter, Alberta
Waters, Ethel, 1896-1977

Container List

- Personal 1914-1985
 - b. 1 f. 1 Birth certificate
 - b. 1 f. 2 Marriage and divorce documents 1919-1923
 - b. 1 f. 3 Diary 1927-1946
 - b. 1 f. 4 Reminiscences undated
- Correspondence 1924-1985
 - Family
 - b. 1 f. 5 1964-1969
 - b. 1 f. 6 1970-1979
 - b. 1 f. 7 1980-1985
 - Friends
 - b. 1 f. 8 1924-1939
 - b. 1 f. 9 1951-1959
 - b. 1 f. 10 1960-1969
 - b. 1 f. 11 1970-1976
 - b. 1 f. 12 1977-1978
 - b. 2 f. 1 1979
 - b. 2 f. 2 1980-1982
 - b. 2 f. 3 1983-1985
 - b. 2 f. 4 Fields, Laura Beatty 1936-1954
 - b. 2 f. 5 Halsey, Gerd 1980
 - b. 2 f. 6 Townsend, Willard 1928-1948
 - b. 2 f. 7 Waters, Ethel 1940-1948
 - Watts, Ruthie
 - b. 2 f. 8 1965-1969
 - b. 2 f. 9 1970-1974
 - b. 2 f. 10 undated
 - b. 2 f. 11 Charitable contributions 1961-1976
 - b. 3 f. 1 Will 1967-1982
 - b. 3 f. 2 Life insurance 1914-1953
 - b. 3 f. 3 Home insurance 1954-1983
 - b. 3 f. 4 Passport applications 1927-1952
 - b. 3 f. 5-6 Passports 1933-1973
 - b. 3 f. 7 Alien registration card 1928-1935
 - b. 3 f. 8 Identification papers 1936-1938
- Financial records
 - b. 3 f. 9 1929-1954
 - b. 3 f. 10 1961-1982
- b. 3 f. 11-13 Address books

Personal (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 14 Notebook
- b. 3 f. 15 Autograph book 1925-1927
- b. 3 f. 16 Clippings 1965-1975
- b. 3 f. 17 Miscellaneous 1947-1983
- b. 20 Greeting cards, certificates, and diplomas 1945-1984
- Professional-singing career 1923-1986
- Correspondence 1923-1985
 - b. 4 f. 1 1923-1949
 - b. 4 f. 2 1950-1969
 - b. 4 f. 3 1971-1977
 - b. 4 f. 4 1978
 - b. 4 f. 5 1979
 - b. 4 f. 6 1980-1981
 - b. 4 f. 7 1982-1985
 - b. 4 f. 8 undated
 - Feinman and Krasilovsky
 - b. 4 f. 9 1978-1980
 - b. 4 f. 10 1981-1983
 - b. 4 f. 11 1984
 - b. 5 f. 1 Goldman, Stewart 1982-1985
 - Remember My Name*
 - b. 5 f. 2 1977-1978 April
 - b. 5 f. 3 1978 May-October
 - b. 5 f. 4 1979-1982
 - b. 5 f. 5 "Portrait in Blues" ("Blues in the Night") 1981-1982
 - b. 5 f. 6 American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) 1953-1984
 - b. 5 f. 7 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 1937-1984
 - b. 5 f. 8 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) 1959-1966
 - b. 5 f. 9 CBS Records 1978-1982
 - b. 5 f. 10 Dovetail Productions Inc 1979-1980
 - b. 5 f. 11 Leeds Music Corporation 1952-1964
 - b. 5 f. 12 Smithsonian Institution 1978-1983
 - b. 5 f. 13 Southern Television Limited 1979-1980
 - b. 5 f. 14 USO Camp shows 1940-1953
 - b. 5 f. 15 Veterans Hospital Camp Shows, Inc 1950
 - b. 5 f. 16 Financial records 1934-1984
 - Contracts 1923-1983
 - b. 6 f. 1 Performance 1926-1983
 - b. 6 f. 2 Recording 1939-1946
 - Publishing
 - b. 6 f. 3 1923-1939

Professional-singing career (cont.)

Contracts (cont.)

Publishing (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 4 1940-1949
- b. 6 f. 5 1950-1958
- b. 6 f. 6 1969-1981
- b. 6 f. 7 Television and radio 1938-1983

Royalties 1923-1984

- b. 6 f. 8 1923-1948
- b. 6 f. 9 1951-1958
- b. 6 f. 10 1961-1965
- b. 6 f. 11 1966-1969
- b. 6 f. 12 1970-1979
- b. 6 f. 13 1980-1984
- b. 6 f. 14 CBS Records 1980-1984

Copyright registration 1939-1982

- b. 7 f. 1 1939-1949
- b. 7 f. 2 1950-1955
- b. 7 f. 3 1961-1967
- b. 7 f. 4 1971-1979
- b. 7 f. 5 1980-1982

Fan mail 1937-1984

- b. 8 f. 1 1937-1952
- b. 8 f. 2 1977
- b. 8 f. 3 1978 January-March
- b. 8 f. 4 1978 April-June
- b. 8 f. 5 1978 July-September
- b. 8 f. 6 1978 October-December
- b. 9 f. 1 1979 January-June
- b. 9 f. 2 1979 July-September
- b. 9 f. 3 1979 October-December
- b. 9 f. 4 1980 January-June
- b. 9 f. 5 1980 July-December
- b. 10 f. 1 1981 January-June
- b. 10 f. 2 1981 July-December
- b. 10 f. 3 1982 January-June
- b. 10 f. 4 1982 July-November
- b. 10 f. 5 1982 December
- b. 10 f. 6 1983-1984
- b. 11 f. 1-2 undated
- b. 11 f. 3 Special fans 1977-1984

Music by Hunter

- b. 12 f. 1 "Aching Hearted Blues"
- b. 12 f. 2 "After All These Years"

Professional-singing career (cont.)
Music by Hunter (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 3 "Chirpin' the Blues"
- b. 12 f. 4 "The Days Are So Lonesome"
- b. 12 f. 5 "The Deacon's in the Pulpit (Sing Sister Sing)"
- b. 12 f. 6 "Don't Want No Man That's Lazy" 1946 August 26
Date indicated is date of recording.
- b. 12 f. 7 "Down Hearted Blues"
- b. 12 f. 8 "Down South Blues"
- b. 12 "Evening Train"
- b. 12 f. 10 "Got News for You Baby"
- b. 12 f. 11 "He'll Be There"
- b. 12 f. 12 "I'm Gonna Sing in That Heavenly Choir" 1952 March 25
- b. 12 f. 13 "I Am Hard to Satisfy"
- b. 12 f. 15 "I'm Having a Gay Time"
- b. 12 f. 16 "I'm Walkin' the Chalk Line"
- b. 12 f. 17 "I Got Myself a Workin' Woman"
- b. 12 f. 18 "I've Found My Jesus" 1952 March 12
- b. 12 f. 19 "I've Got a Mind to Ramble"
- b. 12 f. 20 "I've Had Enough"
- b. 12 f. 21 "I Just Can't Help Myself"
- b. 12 f. 22 "It's the Last Time Daddy"
- b. 12 f. 23 "I Won't Let You Down"
- b. 12 f. 24 "I Want to Thank You Lord"
- b. 12 f. 25 "Kind Treatment"
- b. 12 f. 26 "The Love I Have for You"
- b. 12 f. 27 "The Man I Love Is Gone"
- b. 12 f. 28 "Midnight Blues"
- b. 12 f. 29 "My Castle's Rockin'"
- b. 12 f. 30 "No Regrets"
- b. 12 f. 31 "Now I'm Satisfied"
- b. 12 f. 32 "Plenty Fittin' Swing"
- b. 12 f. 33 "Reckless Blues"
- b. 12 f. 34 "Rock Little Baby (Rock Little Daddy)"
- b. 12 f. 35 "Rough and Ready Man"
- b. 12 f. 36 "Sneaky Pete Jubilee"
- b. 12 f. 37 "Sowing My Wild Oats"
- b. 12 f. 38 "Streets Paved with Gold"
- b. 12 f. 39 "Sun Up to Sun Down Blues"
- b. 12 f. 40 "Take Your Big Hands Off It"
- b. 12 f. 41 "Two Tired Eyes"
- b. 12 f. 42 "What Have I Done"
- b. 12 f. 43 "What's the Matter Baby"

Professional-singing career (cont.)

Music by Hunter (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 44 "When I Go Home"
- b. 12 f. 45 "Will the Day Ever Come When I Can Rest"
- b. 12 f. 46 "With No Regrets"
- b. 12 f. 47 "Without Rhythm"
- b. 12 f. 48 "Workin' Man"
- b. 12 f. 49 "Yes He Will"
- b. 12 f. 50 "You Better Change"
- b. 12 f. 51 "You Gotta Reap Just What You Sow"
- b. 12 f. 52 "You Have No One to Blame"
- b. 12 f. 53 "You Just Call Him" 1953 July 1
- b. 12 f. 54 "Your Bread May Be Good but It Ain't as Good as Mine"
- b. 12 f. 55 "Your Time Now"
- b. 12 f. 56 "You're Welcome, Always Welcome"
- b. 12 f. 57 *Songs recorded for Remember My Name*

b. 13 f. 1-5 Lyrics by Hunter

- b. 14 f. 1 Music by Hunter and Eubie Blake

Music by others

- b. 14 f. 2 Various composers, including Sidney Easton and Andy Kirk, among others

Includes: "My Friend Told Me", words and music by Andy Kirk and Bernice Brown; "Bye and Bye" (gospel music); "Atlanta Blues" by W. C. Handy and Dave Elman; "Aunt Hagar's Children", lyrics by Tim Brymn and music by W. C. Handy; "Basin Street Blues" by Spencer Williams; "Believe It, Beloved", lyrics by George Whiting and Nat Schwartz and music by J. C. Johnson; "Cast Away (On an Island of Love)", story by James Stewart and melody by Sidney Easton; "After You've Gone" by Creamer and Layton; "Chantez Les Bas" ("Sing Em Low"); "Curfew Time in Harlem" by Willie (The Lion) Smith and Neil Laurencie; "Don't Let Your Love Go Wrong", lyrics by George Whiting and Nat Schwartz and music by J. C. Johnson; "Friendless Blues", words by Mercedes Gilbert and music by W. C. Handy; "Shake It Don't Break It", lyrics by Johnny Mercer and music by Errol Garner; "Taint a Daggone Thing But the Blues" by Porter Grainer and Bob Ricketts; and "What Hasn't Been Done For Love" by Sidney Easton.

- b. 14 f. 3 Various composers, including W. C. Handy and Andy Razaf, among others

Includes: "Saint Louis Blues", words and music by W. C. Handy; "The Hesitating Blues", words and music by W. C. Handy; "How Long Is the Journey", words and music by J. C. Johnson; "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate", words and music by A. J. Piron; "If I Could Be With You (One Hour Tonight)", words and music by Henry Creamer and Jimmy Johnson; "Joe Turner Blues" by W. C. Handy; "The Joint Is Jumpin'", words and music by Andy Razaf, J. C. Johnson, and Thomas "Fats" Waller; "You Can't Be Mine (And Someone Else's Too)", words by J. C. Johnson and Chick Webb and music by J. C. Johnson; "You Stayed Away Too Long", lyrics by George Whiting and Nat Schwartz and music by J. C. Johnson; "There Ain't No Sugar Left on Sugar Hill" by Andy Kirk and arranged by Ray Copeland; "Lord Watcha' Gonna Do Wid Me", words and music by J. C. Johnson; "Long Gone", words by Chris Smith and music by W. C. Handy; "Trav'lin' All Alone", words and music by J. C. Johnson; "Love and Kisses", lyrics by George Whiting and Nat Schwartz and music by J. C. Johnson; "Where Down South Where the Blues Began" by W. C. Handy; and "Yellow Dog Blues", by W. C. Handy.

- b. 14 f. 4 "You Can't Tell After Dark" by Maceo Pincard

- b. 14 f. 5 "Ten Original Jazz Tunes" (1st edition) and music by Spencer Williams

Includes "You've Got to Give Me Some" and "I'm Wild About That Thing", words and music by Spencer Williams.

- b. 14 f. 6 "Favorite songs"

Includes "Beale Street Blues", words and music by W. C. Handy; and "The Memphis Blues", words by George A. Norton and music W. C. Handy.

- b. 14 f. 7 Songs sent to Hunter

Professional-singing career (cont.)

Music by others (cont.)

- b. 14 f. 8 Lyrics by others
 - Clippings 1924-1986
 - b. 15a 1924-1940s
 - Box 15a replaces box 15, folder 1.
 - b. 15 f. 2 1950-1956
 - b. 15 f. 3 1961-1968
 - b. 15 f. 4 1972-1977
 - b. 15 f. 5 1978 January-March
 - b. 15 f. 6 1978 April-June
 - b. 15 f. 7 1978 July-September
 - b. 15 f. 8 1978 October-December
 - b. 15 f. 9 1979 January-June
 - b. 15 f. 10 1979 July-December
 - b. 16 f. 1 1980
 - b. 16 f. 2 1981
 - b. 16 f. 3 1982 January-June
 - b. 16 f. 4 1982 July-December
 - b. 16 f. 5 1983 February-June
 - b. 16 f. 6 1983 July-November
 - b. 16 f. 7 1984
 - b. 16 f. 8 Obituaries 1984
 - b. 16 f. 9 1985-1986
 - b. 16 f. 10 undated
 - b. 16a *Grim-Kowles, George. "Two of a Kind", Reader's Digest, review of Hunter mounted on a plaque*
 - b. 17 f. 1 Interviews 1984-1985
 - b. 17 f. 2 Notes on issues and sales of recordings
 - b. 17 f. 3 Schedules 1979-1984
 - b. 17 f. 4 Song list
 - b. 17 f. 5 Programs and broadsides 1931-1985
 - b. 17 f. 6 Printed matter 1924-1985
 - Scrapbooks
 - b. 18 1923-1924
 - b. 19 1923-1940
- Professional-nursing career 1955-1983
- b. 21 f. 1 Correspondence 1955-1966
 - b. 21 f. 2 Goldwater Memorial Hospital 1977
 - b. 21 f. 3-4 Class notes 1957
 - Notebooks
 - b. 21 f. 5 1956
 - b. 21 f. 6-7 1957-1960
 - b. 21 f. 8 YWCA School 1956

Professional-nursing career (cont.)

- b. 21 f. 9 Work schedule 1969-1975
- b. 21 f. 10 Printed matter 1956-1977
- b. 21 f. 11 Miscellaneous 1966-1983
- b. 22 *Taylor, Frank. Research files for his book, Alberta Hunter: A Celebration in Blues* ca. 1987