



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

Guide to the

**Alma John papers**

1955 - 1980

Sc MG 135

## Summary

**Creator:** John, Alma, 1906-1986

**Title:** Alma John papers

**Date:** 1955 - 1980

**Size:** 5.1 linear feet (4 record cartons; 1 shoe box; and 3 archival boxes)

**Source:** Gift, Alma John Estate, August 1990.

**Abstract:** Alma John was a radio talk show producer, registered nurse, and newspaper columnist. She was the first African-American female director of a school of practical nursing in New York State. As Executive Director of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, she hosted and wrote the scripts for the radio program, *Brown Women in White*. The collection consists of personal papers; correspondence; radio scripts; typescripts and news clippings of her columns; and printed matter and newsletters.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Alma John papers, Sc MG 135, 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 Karen Clark on August 9, 1993.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division: three boxes of books and a pamphlet.

Transferred to the Moving Image and Sound Division: over sixty audiotapes.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: one photograph and slides.

Transferred to other collections in Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books: programs to the Programs and Playbills collection; calendar to the Calendar collection; numerous flyers, clippings, invitations to the Vertical File; and broadsides to Broadside collection.

## Creator History

Alma John was born in 1906, in Philadelphia, the eldest of nine children from a poor family. After graduating from high school, she used the money she had earned to move to New York to study nursing. She graduated from New York University and the Harlem Hospital School of Nursing and became a registered nurse in 1929. She then worked as a staff nurse at Harlem Hospital until 1939 when she was dismissed from her job for trying to organize workers around a demand for better working conditions and higher wages. She went on to become the director of the School for Practical Nurses at the Upper Manhattan YWCA. Alma John was the first African-American woman to become a director of a school of practical nursing in New York State.

In 1946 she accepted a position with the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses as executive director, traveling the country in search of educational employment opportunities for African-American professional nurses. As part of her efforts, she persuaded NBC to grant her a half hour time slot for a program discussing problems encountered by African-American nurses. She wrote the script for the program, *Brown Women in White*, which was aired on sixty-nine stations. In 1952, she got her first radio program on station WWRL, covering everything from religion to teen-agers. Among her many awards was the *McCall's* Magazine Golden Microphone award.

In addition to being a nurse and radio personality, Alma John wrote regular columns, and hosted and eventually produced the television program *Black Pride*. She also created Alma John Workshop, Inc., with a program geared toward improving public health, education, and community involvement.

In all of her endeavors, she sought to increase awareness of the importance of education and community participation. Thus, she lived by the credo she espoused, "If you know teach, if you don't know learn. Each one reach one. Each one teach one."

## Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of personal papers, including diaries and datebooks, from 1950 - 1980; correspondence from the 1930s - 1980s; radio scripts from Alma John's various shows on WWRL; typescripts and news clippings of her columns; and printed matter and newsletters from the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, the Black Nurse Association, and other African-American nursing organizations. Additionally, there is material on the Alma John Workshop, which was a program geared toward improving public health, education, and community involvement; this material includes newsletters, clippings, and administrative records.

**Arrangement:** Papers organized into three series: I. Personal papers; II. Correspondence; and III. Professional and community activities.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American nurses -- United States  
African American women  
African Americans and mass media  
African Americans in radio broadcasting

Nursing -- United States  
Radio programs -- United States

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Diaries  
Radio scripts

**Geographic Names**

Harlem (New York, N.Y.) -- Social life and customs  
United States -- Social life and customs

**Names**

John, Alma, 1906-1986  
Alma John Workshops Association  
Black Nurse Association  
National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses

## Container List

### Personal papers

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical information
- b. 1 f. 2 Academic writing
- b. 1 f. 3 Certificates
- b. 1 f. 4-11 Scrapbooks
- b. 1 f. 12 Scrapbook by Victor Infante
- b. 1 f. 13 Poems to Alma John
- b. 1 f. 14 Cornwall Lisley John
- b. 2 Diaries and datebooks 1950 - 1980
- b. 3 Guest book 1950 - 1960

### Correspondence

- b. 4 f. 1 1930s
- b. 4 f. 2 1940s
- b. 4 f. 3 1950s
- b. 4 f. 4-7 1960s
- b. 4 f. 8-18 1970s
- b. 5 f. 1-3 1980s
- b. 5 f. 4 undated

### Telegrams

- b. 5 f. 5 1950s
- b. 5 f. 6 1960s
- b. 5 f. 7 1970s
- b. 5 f. 8 undated
- b. 5 f. 9 Student thank you letters undated
- b. 5 f. 10 Stationery
- b. 6 Fan mail 1970s

### Professional and community activities

#### Nursing

- b. 7 f. 1-2 Black Nurses Association  
Includes printed matter and newsletters.
- b. 7 f. 3 Harlem Hospital School of Nursing
- b. 7 f. 4-5 National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses  
Includes printed matter and newsletters.
- b. 7 f. 6-7 African-American nurses  
Includes printed matter and clippings.

#### Columns

- b. 7 f. 8-9 "Alma John Says" typescripts and clippings
- b. 7 f. 10-11 "Essence of Living" typescripts and clippings
- b. 7 f. 12 "Beauty Wise" clippings

#### Radio and television

Professional and community activities (cont.)

Radio and television (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 13      Miscellaneous radio typescripts
- b. 7 f. 14-15      Show schedules
- b. 7 f. 16      Radio scripts
- b. 7 f. 17-18      "Alma John Talks To Teens"  
Includes scripts and background information.
- b. 7 f. 19      "The Homemaker's Club" scripts
- b. 7 f. 20      Radio series proposals
- b. 7 f. 21      WWRL
- b. 7 f. 22      *Black Pride printed matter*
- b. 7 f. 23      *Helen in Paris printed matter*

Alma John Workshop

- b. 7 f. 24      Administrative material
- b. 7 f. 25      Proposal for Metric Education Funds
- b. 7 f. 26      Printed matter
- b. 7 f. 27      Newsletters
- b. 7 f. 28      Flyers
- b. 7 f. 29      Clippings
- b. 7 f. 30      Itineraries
- b. 7 f. 31      Ephemera
- b. 7 f. 32-33      Clippings about Alma John

Community projects

- b. 7 f. 34      Printed matter
  - b. 8      Journals and newsletters
  - b. 8      Flyers
  - b. 8      Programs
  - b. 8      Ephemera
- b. 8 o. Flat file A      Certificates
  - b. 8      Mailing lists