



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

Guide to the

William H. Butler papers

1917-1982

Sc MG 225

Summary

Creator: Butler, William H. (William Henson), 1903-1981

Title: William H. Butler papers

Date: 1917-1982

Size: 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Gift of Bill Lenzler on behalf of the William Butler Estate, January 1985.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: "Billy" Butler was a musical arranger, conductor, violinist, and travel editor of the Pittsburgh Courier. A graduate of Chicago Musical College, Butler worked with J. Rosamond Johnson, Eubie Blake, and other prominent African American musicians of the period. He also conducted several musical revues, including Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1939, Rhapsody in Black, and Sissle and Blake's Shuffle Along. In 1947, Butler started Travelguide, a directory of public accommodations in the United States which catered to people of African descent. The list was later expanded to include foreign countries. Butler was also co-owner of King Travel Organization, Inc., a New York City agency which specifically catered to travelers of African descent. The William H. Butler papers include correspondence and printed material relating to Butler's musical career; articles by Butler on African American music and musicians; a scrapbook containing reviews of the Lew Leslie musicals in which he appeared; orchestral parts for Blackbirds of 1939 and Rhapsody in Black; holograph scores by Butler; a folder of lyrics; and a playscript by Butler entitled "Let's Forget Papa".

Preferred citation: [Item], William H. Butler papers, Sc MG 225, 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, 1985.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division:

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

"Billy" Butler was a musical arranger, conductor, violinist, and travel editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*. A graduate of Chicago Musical College, Butler worked with J. Rosamond Johnson, Eubie Blake, and other prominent African American musicians of the period. He also conducted several musical revues, including Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds of 1939*, *Rhapsody in Black*, and Sissle and Blake's *Shuffle Along*. In 1947, Butler started *Travelguide*, a directory of public accommodations in the United States which catered to people of African descent. The list was later expanded to include foreign countries. Butler was also co-owner of King Travel Organization, Inc., a New York City agency which specifically catered to travelers of African descent.

Scope and Content Note

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Key Terms

Subjects

African American businesspeople
African American conductors (Music)
African American entertainers
African American musicians
Authors, Black
Travel agents

Occupations

Violinists.

Names

Blake, Eubie, 1887-1983
Butler, William H. (William Henson), 1903-1981

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 **Correspondence 1917-1982**
Mostly business correspondence relating to Butler's activities in the music field. Includes some family items such as a letter from his nephew, Leighton Nash, who later became an actor as well as a letter, in Italian, listing a record of the birth and death dates, as well as other genealogical information, pertaining to his wife's family.
- b. 1 f. 2 **Passports and identification cards 1934-1981**
- b. 1 f. 3-4 **News clippings 1934-1982**
Includes articles by Butler about Black music and Black musicians; items regarding Butler's musical and social activities; and articles about Travelguide.
- b. 1 f. 5-6 **Scrapbook 1934-1982**
- b. 1 f. 7 **Miscellaneous printed matter 1948-1982**
Includes stamps, a biography on Butler, an eulogy for Marion Cumbo, a speech for Canada Lee's memorial service, church programs, broadsides, and invitations.
- b. 2 f. 1 **Financial and business records 1934-1981**
- b. 2 f. 2 **Music contracts and copyright documents 1928-1946**
Music
Overture to "Blackbirds of 1939"
- b. 2 f. 3 **Parts for strings**
- b. 2 f. 4 **Parts for piano, saxophone, and trombone**
- b. 2 f. 5 **"Rhapsody in Black", parts for brass and percussion**
- b. 2 f. 6 **Instrumental and vocal compositions 1929-1958**
- b. 2 f. 7 **Song lyrics**
"Let's Forget Papa" playscript 1945
- b. 2 f. 8 **Act I (16 pages)**
- b. 2 f. 9 **Acts I and II (incomplete)**
- b. 2 f. 10 **Visitors' register for "Africa Today" (travel lecture or presentation) 1960**
December 9
- b. 2 f. 11 **Guest book from memorial service for Butler 1981 March 23**
- b. 2 f. 12 **Ration book holder and food ration stamps from WW II for Mary Butler**