



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

Guide to the

**Katherine Handy Lewis papers**

1920-1983

Sc MG 336

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

## Summary

**Creator:** Lewis, Katherine Handy, 1902-1982

**Title:** Katherine Handy Lewis papers

**Date:** 1920-1983

**Size:** 2.17 linear feet (6 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of E. T. Williams, 1988.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** Katherine Handy Lewis was an early blues singer who was the first to sing the songs written by her father, W. C. Handy. The Katherine Handy Lewis papers document some of Mrs. Lewis's personal and professional interests and include material relating to her father and to the Handy Brothers Music Company.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Katherine Handy Lewis papers, Sc MG 336, 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, 1988, and Janice Quinter, 2011.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: posters.

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

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

**Related Materials:**

## Creator History

Katherine (sometimes spelled Katharine) Handy Lewis was an early blues singer who was the first to sing the songs written by her father, W. C. Handy. Born in Normal, Alabama in 1902, her family moved to Harlem, New York, in 1919. Lewis performed at an historic concert at Carnegie Hall in 1928, the first evening of African American music presented in the then bastion of white music. At the concert, she sang "St. Louis Blues", written by her father, and one of the first blues songs ever published.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Lewis sang on the radio. Later, she married Homer D. Lewis and retired from performing to raise a family. She stayed active, however, in the company founded by her father, Handy Bros. Music Company, of which she was president for a time. Lewis died in 1982.

## Scope and Content Note

The Katherine Handy Lewis papers document some of Lewis's personal and professional interests and include material relating to her father and the Handy Bros. Music Company. Papers pertaining to Lewis consist of biographical information, correspondence, printed material, and financial records concerning her musical endeavors, but do not reflect her presidency of the Handy Bros. Music Company. Family papers include financial and legal records related to the Handy family, including Lewis's husband and son, Homer Sr. and Homer Jr., in addition to correspondence between W. C. Handy and Lewis. Of special interest are a memorandum of agreement between Handy and E. A. Niles to collaborate on a collection of blues; a legal document referring to W. C. Handy's estate; and printed material regarding the W. C. Handy Home and Museum in Florence, Alabama. Additional papers relating to W. C. Handy are comprised of printed material on the W. C. Handy Centennial Celebration in Florence, Alabama; correspondence about issuing a commemorative stamp; and undated writings. Records of the Handy Bros. Music Company consist of sheet music published by the company, some written by Lewis; correspondence; a catalog of music; legal and financial records; and a script for a television program, *Road to Freedom*, by Douglas Hardee, which focused on the struggle of African Americans in Alabama and featured W. C. Handy, among others.

**Arrangement:** Arranged into 3 series: I. Katherine Handy Lewis; II. Handy family; and III. Handy Bros. Music Company.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American families  
African American women composers  
African American women in the professions  
African American women musicians  
African American women singers  
Authors, Black  
Blues (Music)

Music publishers

**Names**

Handy, W. C. (William Christopher), 1873-1958

Lewis, Katherine Handy, 1902-1982

Handy Bros. Music Co.

## Container List

### Katherine Handy Lewis 1921-1983

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical 1982
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Correspondence 1921-1981
- b. 1 f. 4 Scrapbook 1930-1939
- b. 1 f. 5 Printed matter 1946-1981
- b. 1 f. 6 Financial records 1976-1982
- b. 1 f. 7 American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers 1979-1983
- b. 1 f. 8 Beale Street National Historic Foundation 1977
- b. 1 f. 9 Carnegie Hall 90th Anniversary 1981
- b. 1 f. 10 National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc 1974-1979
- b. 2 f. 1 National Music Publishers Association 1978-1981
- b. 2 f. 2 New York Public Library, Music Division 1974
- b. 2 f. 3 Rehabilitation and Research Center Communications Award Dinner 1978-1980
- b. 2 f. 4 W. C. Memorial Scholarship Fund 1977

### Handy family 1925-1983

- b. 2 f. 5 Handy, Irma L 1974-1983
- b. 2 f. 7 Handy, W. C., Jr 1958
- Handy, W. C., Sr
- b. 2 f. 7 Correspondence 1939-1957
- b. 2 f. 8 Memorandum of agreement 1925
- b. 2 f. 9 Writing undated
- Printed matter
- b. 2 f. 10 1928-1969
- b. 2 f. 11 1970-1982
- b. 2 f. 12 W. C. Handy Home and Museum, Florence, Alabama 1970
- b. 3 f. 1-2
- b. 3 f. 3-5 W. C. Handy, Centennial Celebration, Florence, Alabama 1973
- b. 3 f. 6 W. C. Handy commemorative stamp 1968-1969
- b. 3 f. 7 Lewis, Homer, Jr 1941-1983
- b. 3 f. 8 Lewis, Homer, Sr 1946-1981

### Handy Bros. Music Company ca. 1920s-1982

- b. 4 f. 1 Correspondence 1955-1981
- b. 4 f. 2 Printed matter 1949-1981
- b. 4 f. 3 Legal records 1941-1982
- b. 4 f. 4 Financial records 1979-1981
- Handy, W. C. sheet music 1920s-1940s
- b. 5 f. 1 A-C
- b. 5 f. 2 F-M
- b. 5 f. 3 "Saint Louis Blues"

Handy Bros. Music Company (cont.)

Handy, W. C. sheet music (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 4      S
- b. 5 f. 5      T-Y
- b. 6 f. 1      Handy, Elizabeth sheet music 1936
- b. 6 f. 2      Lewis, Katherine Handy sheet music 1944
- b. 6 f. 3      Unidentified and incomplete holograph score
- b. 6 f. 4      Sheet music by other composers
- b. 6 f. 5      Sheet music published by Handy Bros. Music Company and arranged by  
Noah Francis Ryder