



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

Guide to the

Helen Armstead-Johnson papers

1942-1995

Sc MG 599

Processed by Janice Quinter, 2011.

Summary

Creator: Johnson, Helen A.

Title: Helen Armstead-Johnson papers

Date: 1942-1995

Size: 8.67 linear feet (10 boxes)

Source: Gift of Helen Armstead-Johnson, December 1996.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Helen Armstead-Johnson (1920-2006) was an English professor and the founder/director of the Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theater Research, whose purpose was to collect, preserve, document and exhibit African-American contributions to the American stage. The Helen Armstead-Johnson papers reflect some aspects of the personal life and professional career of this African American theater historian and educator.

Preferred citation: [Item], Helen Armstead-Johnson papers, Sc MG 599, 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: Processed by Janice Quinter, 2011.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Related Materials:

The following collections, all donated by Helen Armstead-Johnson, are located in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Sc MG 599, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture:

A. Lincoln Harris scrapbook

Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theater Research records

Edith Spencer scrapbook

Elliot Carpenter papers

Florence Mills collection

Flournoy Miller collection

Glenn and Jenkins scrapbook

Helen Armstead-Johnson miscellaneous theater collections

Opal Cooper collection

Sidney Easton papers

Creator History

Helen Armstead-Johnson (1920-2006) was an English professor and the founder/director of the Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theater Research, whose purpose was to collect, preserve, document and exhibit African American contributions to the American stage. Johnson spent her professional life as an educator, primarily at the college level, and taught for 23 years at York College, City University of New York, until her retirement in 1990.

Scope and Content Note

The Helen Armstead-Johnson papers reflect some aspects of the personal life and professional career of this African-American theater historian and educator. The collection consists of personal papers, files from her teaching career, correspondence, lectures, writings, and research material.

Arrangement: Collection organized into six series: I. Personal papers; II. Teaching career; III. Correspondence; IV. Professional activities; V. Writing; and VI. Research material.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American theater
African American women -- Education
African American women college teachers
African American women teachers
Authors, Black
Black English
Theater historians

Names

Johnson, Helen A.

McCarthy, Joseph, 1908-1957

Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theater Research

Container List

Personal 1931-1988

This series consists of biographical information about Johnson, correspondence with her family and friends, and documents pertaining to her parents' death. There is also information about her college education and a women's social and civic group called Moles, to which she belonged. A copy of her Master's thesis, "A Semantic Analysis of [Joseph] McCarthy's Language", is included in this series.

Biographical information

- b. 1 f. 1 1966-1974
- b. 1 f. 2 1975-1988
- b. 1 f. 3 Interview 1975

Scrapbook I

- b. 1 f. 4 1922-1963
- b. 1 f. 5 Letters and certificates 1934-1960
- b. 1 f. 6 Photographs and ID cards 1956-1957
- b. 1 f. 7 News clippings 1960

Scrapbook II 1934-1939

- b. 2 f. 1 Bordentown Manual Training School 1931-1937
Includes autograph album and newspaper.

Correspondence

- b. 2 f. 2 General 1945-1994
- b. 2 f. 3 Family 1942-1974
- b. 2 f. 4 Marriages 1953-1958
- b. 2 f. 5 Johnson, Helen Caroline (death)
- b. 2 f. 6 Armstead, Frank Cordell (death)
- b. 2 f. 7 Friends 1960s
- b. 2 f. 8-9 Incoming 1974-1975

Moles

- b. 2 f. 10 1962-1964
- b. 2 f. 11 1964-1967
- b. 2 f. 12 Washington Youth Conference address list

Education

- b. 2 f. 13 Pennsylvania State University 1956-1967
- b. 2 f. 14-15 Howard University, Atlanta University, and Virginia State College 1954-1957
Includes Master's thesis for Atlanta University, "A Semantic Analysis of [Joseph] McCarthy's Language".

News clippings

- b. 2 f. 16 1966-1974
- b. 2 f. 17 1975-1988

Teaching career 1950-1989

This series reflects Johnson's search for a teaching position pending receipt of her Ph.D. and teaching posts she held prior to her appointment at York College. York College material encompasses some yearly activity reports and bibliographies, examinations she used for general English and African American literature courses, and student evaluations. Of interest is a letter she wrote giving her reasons for rejecting a proposal to initiate a course in "Black English" as well as a subject file for this topic. There is also correspondence with York colleagues planning the spring 1971 meeting of the Greater New York Regional College English Association.

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 2 f. 18 **Job applications 1957**
- b. 2 f. 19 **Various positions 1950-1958**
Includes District of Columbia Public Schools; South Carolina Department of Education; Virginia State College; and Petersburg Public Schools, Petersburg, Virginia.
- b. 2 f. 20 **Southern University 1956-1969**
- b. 2 f. 21 **Pennsylvania State University, English Department 1966-1967**
York College
- b. 2 f. 22 **1966-1969**
- b. 2 f. 23 **1970**
- b. 2 f. 24 **1971**
- b. 2 f. 25 **1972-1979**
- b. 2 f. 26 **1985**
Black English
- b. 2 f. 27 **Course proposal 1973**
- b. 2 f. 28-29 **Subject file**
- b. 2 f. 30 **Student evaluations 1976**
- b. 2 f. 31 **Sex discrimination charge 1984**
- b. 2 f. 32 **Clippings about Johnson 1985-1989**
- b. 2 f. 33 **Temple University (visiting professorship) 1969-1988**

Correspondence 1954-1995

This series includes correspondence pertaining to invitations from publishers and journals for Johnson to submit articles and books, or to serve as a reviewer. Research inquiries consist of requests for information about Black theater history and guidance in interviewing older musicians. Her research relating to African American entertainers overseas is reflected in correspondence with officials in the Soviet Union and in the file for Bobby LeBrun, a white Australian comedian who worked with African American performers. Other correspondents are composer Elliot Carpenter, Oskar Pausch of Austria (about an exhibit in Vienna), and playwright John F. Matheus (regarding staging a production of his play *Tambour*).

Arranged alphabetically by last name, organization name, or topic.

- b. 3 f. 1 **Atlanta University 1954-1957**
- b. 3 f. 2 **Boston University 1975**
- b. 3 f. 3 **Carpenter, Elliot 1973-1978**
- b. 3 f. 4 ***Choice* 1977-1978**
- b. 3 f. 5 **Fuller, Hoyt W 1970-1978**
- b. 3 f. 6 **Gaffney, Floyd 1973**
- b. 3 f. 7 **Gartnerburg, Max (regarding publication of planned book) 1971-1973**

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 8 LeBrun, Bobby 1983-1985
- b. 3 f. 9 Leshoai, Benjamin Letholoa 1971-1972
- b. 3 f. 10 Manchester Library, England 1974
- b. 3 f. 11 Matheus, John F 1971-1976
- b. 3 f. 12 Paush, Oskar 1980-1983
- b. 3 f. 13 Thompson, Francesca 1972-1976
- b. 3 f. 15 Publications 1968-1985
- b. 3 f. 16 Research inquiries 1960-1995

General

- b. 3 f. 17 1960-1969
- b. 3 f. 18 1970-1971
- b. 3 f. 19 1972-1974
- b. 3 f. 20 1975-1976
- b. 3 f. 21 1977-1980
- b. 3 f. 22 1980-1984
- b. 3 f. 23 1985-1991

Research

- b. 3 f. 24 Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji 1983-1985
- b. 3 f. 25 Edmund Burke 1964-1969
- b. 3 f. 26 Ministry of Culture, USSR 1985
- b. 3 f. 27 Other 1973-1984
- b. 3 f. 28 Miscellaneous invitations 1972-1988
- b. 3 f. 29 Address lists on index cards

Professional activities 1960-1995

This series consists of information about lectures, consultancies, research grants, and conferences. The files encompass correspondence pertaining to her lectures about various aspects of African American theater history and consultancies, such as one with WNET regarding programs on Black musical theater and another one with Rutgers University concerning a Paul Robeson exhibition. There are files for conferences in which she either attended, gave papers, or helped to coordinate, among them the College Language Association, the College English Association, the Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment, the Musical Theater in American Conference, and the Société Internationale des Arts du Spectacle. When available, copies of her lectures and conference papers are included. Also included is a copy of Julian Mates's paper, "The Minstrel Show and the American Musical Stage", presented at the American Theatre Association conference.

- b. 3 f. 30 American Theatre Association 1971-1978
- b. 3 f. 31 Negro American Literature Forum 1969-1973
- b. 3 f. 32 Theater Library Association 1978-1985

Lectures

- b. 3 f. 33 College of Saint Elizabeth, "Black Studies with Honor" 1969
- b. 3 f. 34 North Carolina Central University 1969-1970
- b. 3 f. 35 Finch College 1972
- b. 3 f. 36 Hanover College 1969
- b. 3 f. 37 Ursuline College 1969-1970
- b. 3 f. 38 University of Iowa 1973-1977

Professional activities (cont.)

Lectures (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 39 Durham City Schools, "A Humanities Approach to the Teaching of Black Studies" 1978
- b. 3 f. 40 Clark College 1979
- b. 3 f. 41 Strong Museum, "Black America on Stage: Some Late Information on Some Early People" 1992
- b. 3 f. 42 "Afro-American Performers in the Nineteenth Century" slide presentation undated
- b. 3 f. 43-44 Various 1963-1993

Consultancies

- b. 3 f. 45 Ralph Bunche Awards Program 1973
- b. 3 f. 46 Harvard University 1974
- b. 3 f. 47 WNET/Thirteen, "The Historical Roots of the Black Experience in Music, Dance and Drama" 1978
- b. 3 f. 48 Nexus Creative Alliance (NCA), "Black on Broadway: A Living History of Black Musical Theatre" 1993
- b. 3 f. 49 Paul Robeson Cultural Center, Rutgers University, "Paul Robeson: Icon or Hero?" 1995

Research grants

- b. 3 f. 50 American Council of Learned Societies 1973
- b. 3 f. 51 Rockefeller Foundation, "Black Influences on the American Stage from Slavery to World War II: An Illumination of Economic, Social, and Political History" proposal 1980
- b. 3 f. 52 Research Foundation of CUNY, "Black American Participation in the Musical Theaters of Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii from the 19th Century to 1940: The Second Phase" report 1983-1984
- b. 3 f. 53 National Endowment for the Humanities 1984-1985
- b. 3 f. 54-55 Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellowship 1986-1989
- b. 3 f. 56 Book acknowledgements 1971-1972

Conferences

College Language Association

- b. 4 f. 1 1960-1968
- b. 4 f. 2 1968-1979
- b. 4 f. 3 "Afro-American Theater History as Cultural Illumination" 1985

College English Association

- b. 4 f. 4 1968-1974
- b. 4 f. 5 Mailing list for paper presented 1969
- b. 4 f. 6 "Afro-American Literature: Themes and Values" 1970
- b. 4 f. 7 Black Music Center, Indiana University
- b. 4 f. 8 Conference on African and African-American Studies, Atlanta University 1972-1979
- b. 4 f. 9 "Curriculum Development in the Humanities: Afro-American Culture", Indiana Humanities Project 1976

Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment

- b. 4 f. 10 1975-1976
- b. 4 f. 11 1977-1979

Professional activities (cont.)
Conferences (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 1 New World Festival of the African Diaspora, Brazil 1978-1988
Société Internationale des Bibliothèques et Musées des Arts du Spectacle (SIMBAS)
- b. 5 f. 2 1978-1982
- b. 5 f. 3 1985
- b. 5 f. 4 1990
- b. 5 f. 5 A National Conference on Black Museums: Interpreting the Humanities 1980
- b. 5 f. 6-8 Musical Theatre in America Conference, Long Island University 1980-1981
- b. 5 f. 9 American Writers Congress, New York City 1981
- b. 5 f. 10 International Federation for Theatre Research, Leipzig, Germany 1981
- b. 5 f. 11 Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters, "Black Woman Artist", Dallas, Texas 1981
- b. 5 f. 12 "Perspectives in Black Music", Fisk University 1982
- b. 5 f. 13 "Dance Black America", Brooklyn Academy of Music 1983
- b. 5 f. 14 "Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: A National Symposium", Moorland Spingarn Research Center 1983
- b. 5 f. 15 Biblia, "La Musica e la Biblia", Siena, Italy 1990
- b. 5 f. 16 "The Traditional Negro Spiritual and the Bible" 1990
- b. 5 f. 17 National Conference on African American Theatre, "Sylvester Russell: Chicago's Self-Anointed Early Stage Critic" 1995
- b. 5 f. 18 Roots and Rhythms Symposia undated
- b. 5 f. 19-20 Various 1967-1993

Writing 1954-1979

This series reflects Johnson's long-standing interest in Black theater history and consists of copies of her published articles, as well as manuscript drafts of unpublished papers. Her adaption of the libretto for *In Dahomey*, her production files, photocopies of the original libretto and score, and material about the original production also are included. Additionally, her early interest in Edmund Burke is documented with her lengthy manuscript, "Reform and Revolution in the Political Theory of Edmund Burke: His Interpretations of the English, American, and French Revolutions."

Arranged into two subseries: (1) Published and (2) Unpublished.

Published 1902-1976

- b. 5 f. 21-22 Various
In Dahomey
- b. 5 f. 23 Script, original by Jesse A. Shipp, annotated by Armstead-Johnson ca. 1902-1976
- b. 5 f. 24 Vocal score ca. 1903
- b. 5 f. 25 Printed matter from original production ca. 1902-1903
- b. 5 f. 26 Production files 1974-1976
- b. 5 f. 27 Libretto adapted by Armstead-Johnson October 1975
- b. 5 f. 28 Programs 1976
- b. 5 f. 29 News clippings 1976

Writing (cont.)

Unpublished 1954-1979

Generally arranged alphabetically by title.

- b. 5 f. 30 "Afro-American Literature: Themes and Values"
- b. 5 f. 31 "Afro-American Theater History as Cultural Illumination"
- b. 5 f. 32 "Black Americans and the Stage: Three Periods of Development"
- b. 5 f. 33 "Black Drama: Patterns of Protest"
- b. 5 f. 34-35 "Black Influences on the American Stage"
- b. 5 f. 36 "Black Theater: 1960 and After"
- b. 5 f. 37-38 Burke, Edmund
- b. 5 f. 39 "The Nature and Implications of the Reading Problem"
- b. 5 f. 40 "The 1930's: Theater Inside, Outside, and Over"
- b. 6 f. 1 "Origins of Negro entertainment..." (first line)
- b. 6 f. 2-5 "Reform and Revolution in the Political Theory of Edmund Burke: His Interpretations of the English, American, and French Revolutions"
- b. 6 f. 6 "The Rise of the Club"
- b. 6 f. 7 "Supplementary Sources for Afro-American Drama"
- b. 6 f. 8 "Themes and Values in Afro-American Values and Rock Musicals, 1898-1930"
- b. 6 f. 9 Manuscripts 1954-1979
- b. 6 f. 10-12 Untitled drafts and fragments
- Drafts and notes
- b. 6 f. 13 "Black American Actors: A Two Century Perspective"
- b. 6 f. 14-21 "Black Americans on Stage"
- b. 6 f. 22 "Black Drama – Patterns of Change"
- b. 6 f. 23 "Black Women on the Stage"
- b. 6 f. 24 Black writers
- b. 6 f. 25 "Blacks in Black: Genuine Colored Minstrels"
- b. 6 f. 26 "Dance Black America"
- b. 6 f. 27 Drama
- b. 6 f. 28 "The Musical Stage and the Harlem Renaissance"
- b. 6 f. 29 "Over Here and Over There" book outline
- b. 6 f. 30-31 "Shuffle Along"
- b. 6 f. 32-35 Untitled
- b. 6 f. 36 Unidentified author, "Sequence" and "Prelude"

Research material 1964-1984

This series consists of Johnson's handwritten notes, news clippings (photocopies and originals), and writing by other researchers. The subjects of her Black theater research have been filed by geographic region, topic, time period and specific entertainer or composer for ease of retrieval (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, the United States, and minstrels, jokes, lyrics, music, etc.). Most of the notes were written on yellow pads, with many on index cards and memo pads. The majority of the notes were taken from nineteenth and twentieth century newspapers and other published sources. Some of the notes were prepared for the Helen Armstead-Johnson Foundation's international exhibition on view at the Austrian Theater Museum in Vienna for three months in 1982.

Geographic regions

Research material (cont.)
Geographic regions (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 1 Keyssar-Franke, Helene. "A Bibliography of Afro-American Drama, 1960-1972"
- b. 7 f. 2 Writings by others and notes
- b. 7 f. 3 Australia and New Zealand news clippings 1976-1984
- b. 7 f. 4 New Zealand 1855-1903
- b. 7 f. 5 Minstrels: Australia and United States 1873-1874
- b. 7 f. 6-7 Australia 1876-1898
- b. 7 f. 8 Australia and New Zealand 1877-1937
- b. 7 f. 9 Minstrels - United States and New Zealand 1881-1888
- b. 7 f. 10-11 Hawaii 1898-1900
- b. 7 f. 12 African dance drama
- b. 7 f. 13 Allen, Samuel W. (Black poet)
Exhibition – Black Theater Museum, Vienna 1982
- b. 7 f. 14-15 Cole, Bob and Billy Johnson
- b. 7 f. 16 Trip log
- b. 7 f. 17 Hatch, James V
- b. 7 f. 18 Johnson, J. Rosamund
- b. 7 f. 19 Jokes, United States 1877-1919
- b. 7 f. 20-21 McAdoo family 1890s
Minstrels
- b. 7 f. 22 *Florence Mills, U.S. Thompson, Porgy* 1846-1867
- b. 7 f. 23 Georgia minstrels and Ira Aldridge 1867-1872
- b. 7 f. 24 United States 1874-1877
- b. 7 f. 25 Music 1890s
- b. 7 f. 26 Negro folk songs
- b. 7 f. 27 New York City, 20th century
- b. 7 f. 28 Parker, Bernard
- b. 7 f. 29 Route sheets 1865-1871
- b. 7 f. 30 Whipper, Leigh
- b. 7 f. 31-33 Multiple topics
- b. 8-9 Includes notes on index cards (box 9).
- b. 10 *Fletcher, Tom. One Hundred Years of the Negro in Show Business index card notes*