



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Lula Vollmer papers**

1847-1972 [bulk 1910-1945]

\*T-Mss 1977-005

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** Vollmer, Lula

**Title:** Lula Vollmer papers

**Date:** 1847-1972 [bulk 1910-1945]

**Size:** 18.48 linear feet (44 boxes)

**Source:** Unknown.

**Abstract:** Lula Vollmer (d. 1955) was an American folk dramatist. The collection dates from 1847 to 1972 and documents her writing career through dramatic and literary manuscripts, correspondence, contracts, and other materials relating to the publication and production of her work.

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## Creator History

Lula Vollmer (d. 1955) was an American folk dramatist whose stories often centered on the lives of independent mountain women. Born Louisa Smith Vollmer in North Carolina, she spent her childhood traveling around the Southern United States wherever her father found work as a lumberman. Vollmer began writing as a child and published her first work in *The Nickel Magazine* at the age of seventeen. After high school she worked for a short time as a reporter on a weekly newspaper, then as an auditor at the Hotel Piedmont in Atlanta, Georgia before moving to New York in the early 1920s. She completed her first play, *Sun-Up*, while selling tickets at the Theatre Guild. The play, which would become her best-known work, debuted on Broadway at the Provincetown Playhouse in 1923. The show was made into a motion picture in 1925 and a television movie in 1939. Vollmer's other plays included *The Shame Woman* (1923), *The Dunces Boy* (1925), and *Trigger* (1927), which was made into a silent film in 1934 called *Spitfire*, starring Katherine Hepburn.

Vollmer frequently wrote multiple versions of a single title for vaudeville, theater, radio, television, motion pictures, and short stories, sometimes attempting publication or production between each adaptation. In the 1930s, Vollmer began writing more extensively for radio serials, including *The Widow's Son*, *Grits and Gravy*, *Moonshine and Honeysuckle*, and *It's Your Business*. She had several short stories published in *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, including *The Road That Led Afar* (1939), which was later adapted into an episode of *The General Electric Theater* in 1956. This and a few other works were published or produced after her death.

Lula Vollmer died of a heart attack in New York City in 1955.

## Scope and Content Note

The collection dates from 1847 to 1972 and documents Vollmer's writing career through dramatic and literary manuscripts, correspondence, contracts, and other materials relating to the publication and production of her work. Also present are estate papers that document the activities of the administrator of Vollmer's estate, nephew N. Cecil Hill, after her death in 1955. They consist of legal documents, Hill's own writings from the 1930s, and correspondence regarding the promotion and sale of Vollmer's work following her death.

Vollmer's writings make up the bulk of the collection and consist of hand and typewritten manuscripts for essays, speeches, short stories, novels, and scripts for radio, television, motion pictures, and theater. The writings are arranged by title. Works are usually represented through multiple adaptations for television, radio, theater, short stories, and books. Writing files dated after 1955 contain correspondence, reviews, and scripts for works distributed or produced by Vollmer's family after her death.

The best-represented works in the collection include *Sun-Up*, *The Shame Woman*, *The Hill Between*, and *Sentinels*. Material for *Sun-Up* consists of several adaptations of the work from 1918 to 1956, including the 1952 opera with libretto by Polish composer Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern. *The Shame Woman* is represented through drafts of several working titles in multiple formats, including the short stories *Lize* (1921, published in *Yes or No: The Yellow Magazine*) and *The Rider*, and drafts of a novel entitled *Through Closed Doors*. Early drafts of *Sentinels* under the title *The Honor and the Glory* are present. Many of the files, such as those for *The Last Bottle*, document the development of Vollmer's work from the original, handwritten drafts to publication.

Radio serial scripts are for episodes of *The Widow's Son*, *Grits and Gravy*, *Moonshine and Honeysuckle*, *It's Your Business*, and Gabriel Heatter's *A Brighter Tomorrow*. *Moonshine and Honeysuckle* is the best represented radio serial in the collection, with scripts and notes for 139 consecutive episodes from 1930 to 1933. Files for *Moonshine and Honeysuckle* also contain drafts for other adaptations, such as a short story, novel excerpts, and scripts for vaudeville and theater. Some radio files contain additional materials, such as screenplay synopses of *The Widow's Sons*, or research material gathered by Vollmer for episode ideas.

Essays and speeches in the collection discuss women in theater, playwriting, and autobiographical sketches. Essay titles include *My Experiences in Theatre*, *Careering and Housekeeping*, and *Why Girls Should Go on Stage*. Speeches include those for radio and the Poe Society. One folder of Vollmer's unpublished poetry is also present.

Correspondence is largely professional in nature and discusses contracts with media stations, royalty

agreements, box office statements, letters of admiration, rejection letters, and the distribution, publication, and production of Vollmer's works. The box office statements and contracts themselves are also present. Primary correspondents include Vollmer, the National Broadcasting Company, publicity agents, theater managers and directors, and magazine editors. Letters from actress Lucille La Verne are both professional and personal; other personal correspondence consists of family letters from 1867 to the 1920s.

The collection holds a small amount of newspaper clippings and programs for plays Vollmer wrote from 1921 to 1950, such as *The Shame Woman*, *Sun-Up*, *Moonshine* and *Honeysuckle*, *The Hill Between*, and *She Put Out To Go*.

Estate papers date from Vollmer's death in 1955 to 1972 and document the activities of the administrator of the estate, nephew N. Cecil Hill. Correspondence, legal documents, and Hill's unpublished writings from the 1930s are present. Correspondence is mostly between Hill, Mercia Matthews, and Vollmer's niece, Elizabeth Brown, regarding their efforts to distribute and publish Vollmer's works in 1956. Other materials relate specifically to Hill's role as the administrator of her estate, such as correspondence regarding copyright of Vollmer's works, and invoices and memorandums pertaining to unpaid bills and other financial matters.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged in the following categories: Box Office Statements, Contracts, and Correspondence; Clippings and Programs; Estate Papers; and Writings. Writings are arranged alphabetically by title or genre. All other groups are arranged chronologically.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Dramatists

### **Subjects**

Folk Drama

Radio plays

Theater -- United States

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scripts

Short stories

## Container List

### Box Office Statements, Contracts, and Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1-6 Box Office Statements 1922-1924
- b. 1 f. 7-21 Contracts 1916-1959
- b. 1 f. 22-24 Correspondence 1847-1950
- b. 2 f. 1-14 Correspondence 1918-1955
- b. 2 f. 15-17 Clippings and Programs 1909-1954

### Estate Papers

#### Lula Vollmer Estate

- b. 2 f. 18-19 1905-1955
- b. 3 f. 1-12 1926-1969
- b. 4 f. 1-31 1955-1969
- b. 5 f. 1-21 1956-1972
- b. 5 f. 22-31 Writings by Cecil N. Hill 1930-1937

### Writings

- b. 5 f. 32 *According to the Prophet* 1941
- b. 5 f. 33 *Actress Vs. Press* 1914
- b. 5 f. 34 *The American Story* 1949-1950
- b. 5 f. 35 "Anne of the Sixth Floor" 1930s
- b. 5 f. 36-37 *At the Junction* 1946
- b. 6 f. 1-3 *The Awakening of Matilda* 1930s
- b. 6 f. 4 *Backstairs* circa 1920  
Or *There's Always a Woman*.
- b. 6 f. 5 *The Bargain* circa 1918
- b. 6 f. 6 "Baseball Story" circa 1918
- b. 6 f. 7-10 "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" 1930s-1956
- b. 6 f. 11 Bible Stories 1947-1948
- b. 7 f. 1 *A Bridge for the Parsonage* 1940s
- b. 7 f. 2 *Calling All Squirrels* 1940s
- b. 7 f. 3-5 *The Chester Secret* circa 1924
- b. 7 f. 6 *A Changed Career* circa 1918
- b. 7 f. 7 "The Cock-eyed World" 1930
- b. 7 f. 8-14 *The Collage of Courage* 1930-1936  
Or *And All Points West* and *In a Nutshell*.
- b. 8 f. 1-5 *The Collage of Courage* 1930-1936
- b. 8 f. 6-7 *A Comedy* 1930s
- b. 8 f. 8 "Crazy Kate's Light" circa 1918  
Synopsis.
- b. 8 f. 9 *The Crimson Scars* circa 1918  
Synopsis.
- b. 8 f. 10 *Daylight* 1930s

Writings (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 11 *Demure* 1930s
- b. 8 f. 11-12 *The Deserter* 1916
- b. 8 f. 13 *Diary of Christine* 1929
- b. 8 f. 14 "Dick's Story" 1915
- b. 8 f. 15-16 *The Dunce Boy* 1924-1925
- b. 9 f. 1-3 *The Dunce Boy* 1925, 1959  
1959 made for television version by Minnie M. Tanter.
- b. 44 f. 6-12 Essays and Speeches 1901-1946
  - b. 9 f. 4 "Exquisite" 1932
  - b. 9 f. 5 "Face Forward" circa 1911
  - b. 9 f. 6 "The False and the True" 1925
  - b. 9 f. 7 *The Flight to Varrennes* 1921
  - b. 9 f. 8 *The Forbidden Sacrifice* 1911
  - b. 9 f. 9-12 *Free Doom* 1930s
  - b. 9 f. 13 *The Funny Man* 1930s  
*Gabriel Heatter's A Brighter Tomorrow*  
1945-1947
  - b. 10 f. 1-31 1946-1947
  - b. 11 f. 1-3 1947
  - b. 11 f. 4-5 *Guardian of the Flame* 1945
  - b. 11 f. 6-7 "Ghost Shoes" 1942
  - b. 11 f. 8 *The Great Drama* 1945  
*Grits and Gravy*  
1934-- Handwritten Drafts
  - b. 12 f. 1-24 1934-- Handwritten Drafts, Episodes 1-23
  - b. 13 f. 1-4 1934-- Episodes 24-27
  - b. 13 f. 5 "A Heart of Sympathy" circa 1912
  - b. 13 f. 6-9 "Hereafter" 1930s
  - b. 13 f. 10 "The Heritage" circa 1910
  - b. 13 f. 11 *The Hidden Reef* --"Episode 1" 1946
  - b. 13 f. 12-16 *The Hill Between* 1937-1938
  - b. 14 f. 1-4 *The Hill Between* 1938, 1959
  - b. 14 f. 5 *Hillbillies* circa 1920
  - b. 14 f. 6 "His Own Story" circa 1910
  - b. 14 f. 7 "Hotel Piece" circa 1910
  - b. 14 f. 8-18 *It's Your Business*-- Episodes 1-11 1949
  - b. 15 f. 1-6 *It's Your Business*-- Episodes 12-17 1949
  - b. 15 f. 7-13 *Jule* 1910
  - b. 15 f. 14 "The Lamp in the Night" 1950
  - b. 15 f. 15 "The Last Bottle" 1921
  - b. 15 f. 16 "The Last Day of the World" circa 1910  
Also called "The Last Man" or "The Legacy of Fate."

Writings (cont.)

- b. 15 f. 17 "Life Stakes" 1934  
By Hugh Royal Smith.
- b. 15 f. 18-19 *Life on Wheels* 1939
- b. 16 f. 1 "The Little Fiddler" 1907
- b. 16 f. 2 "The Living Tomb" circa 1910
- b. 16 f. 3-4 *The Locust Shell* 1910
- b. 16 f. 5 "The Love Letter of a Beggar" 1925
- b. 16 f. 6-9 "The Love Line" 1954-1959  
Includes made for television version by Minnie M. Tranter.  
*Moonshine and Honeysuckle*
- b. 16 f. 10-17 Novel and Play Drafts 1930s
- b. 17 f. 1-5 Play and Vaudeville 1934
- Radio
- b. 17 f. 6-17 Episodes 1-9 1930, 1936
- b. 18 f. 1-24 Episodes 10-32 1930-1931
- b. 19 f. 1-22 Episodes 33-54 1931
- b. 20 f. 1-22 Episodes 55-76 1931-1932
- b. 21 f. 1-22 Episodes 77-98 1932
- b. 22 f. 1-27 Episodes 99-125 1932-1933
- b. 23 f. 1-14 Episodes 126-139 1933
- Handwritten Drafts
- b. 23 f. 15-17 1930
- b. 24 f. 1-11 1930-1931
- b. 25 f. 1-9 1931-1932
- b. 26 f. 1-8 1932-1933
- b. 26 f. 9-15 *New Fields--Synposes, Drafts, Radio Episodes 1-9* 1946-1947
- b. 27 f. 1-2 *New Fields-- Episode 10* 1947
- b. 27 f. 3 *The New Leaf* 1946  
Or *There's Always a Woman*.
- b. 27 f. 4-5 *There's No Such Thing as Chance* 1940s
- b. 27 f. 6 *Number Eighteen* 1941
- b. 27 f. 7 "Only One Killed" 1948
- b. 27 f. 8-9 "Partners" circa 1910
- b. 27 f. 10-12 *The Pay Lady* 1917
- b. 27 f. 13 "The Pinch of Riches" 1930s
- b. 27 f. 14 *The Place* 1940s
- b. 44 f. 13 Poetry 1902
- b. 27 f. 15 "A Prayer to the War Lords" circa 1910
- b. 27 f. 16-17 *Rainbow in the Night* 1944
- b. 28 f. 1-21 *Rainbow in the Night* 1944-1945
- b. 28 f. 22 "Rastina" circa 1920
- b. 28 f. 23 *Rest Arms* 1930s

Writings (cont.)

- b. 28 f. 24-26 "The Road That Led Afar" 1938-1939, 1956
- b. 28 f. 27 *The Romance of Tobacco* 1940s
- b. 28 f. 28 *Roots* 1930s
- b. 28 f. 29 *Scattergood Baines* 1941
- b. 29 f. 1-14 *Sentinels* 1930-1931  
Or *The Honor and the Glory*.
- b. 30 f. 1 *The Settlement* circa 1910
- b. 30 f. 2-13 *Shame Woman* 1915-1923  
Earlier titles include *The Road*, *Lize*, and *The Rider*.
- b. 31 f. 1-2 *Shame Woman* 1956
- b. 31 f. 3-10 *She Put Out to Go* 1939-1946  
Or *Dearly Beloved*.
- b. 32 f. 1-5 *She Put Out to Go* 1939-1946
- b. 32 f. 6-9 *Sinking Sands* circa 1918
- b. 32 f. 10 "Soft Spotted" 1920, 1956
- b. 32 f. 11 "Spotlight on America" 1946
- b. 32 f. 12 "Straight Life" 1930s
- b. 32 f. 13 *The Stripped Pole* 1940
- b. 33 f. 1 *Sug Crump* 1947-1949
- b. 33 f. 2-9 *Sun-Up* 1915-1918
- b. 34 f. 1-7 *Sun-Up* 1925-1952
- b. 34 f. 8 "T. Americus" circa 1922
- b. 34 f. 9 "Things Hoped For" 1941, 1957
- b. 34 f. 10 *Through the Back Door* 1938
- b. 34 f. 11 *Top of Salt Mountain* 1941-1942
- b. 34 f. 12 *The Tragedy of "The Feast of Our Lady of Carmel"* 1911
- b. 34 f. 13-14 *Trigger* circa 1926
- b. 35 f. 1-13 *Trigger* 1927-1933
- b. 36 f. 1-2 "Trouble at 27 Bergen Road" 1940-1959
- b. 36 f. 3-6 *Troyka* 1929-1930
- b. 36 f. 7 *Two Hours at Home* 1930s
- Untitled Excerpts
- b. 36 f. 8-15 1910-1950
- b. 37 f. 1-7 1910-1950
- b. 38 f. 1 1928
- b. 38 f. 2 "The Violinist" circa 1930
- b. 38 f. 3 "When Love Forgives" circa 1910
- b. 38 f. 4 *The Wicked Woman* 1915  
*The Widow's Sons*
- b. 38 f. 5-15 Series 1, Episodes 5-14 1935-1936, 1938  
Also includes draft of motion picture version of the show.
- b. 39 f. 1-17 Series 1, Episodes 15-31 1936

Writings (cont.)

The Widow's Sons (cont.)

- b. 40 f. 1-17      Series 1, Episodes 32-48 1936
- b. 41 f. 1-19      Series 1, Episodes 49-54, Series 2, episodes 1-13 1936-1937
- b. 42 f. 1-9        Series 2, Episodes 14-22 1937
- Handwritten Drafts
- b. 42 f. 10-16      1935-1936
- b. 43 f. 1-7        1936-1937
- b. 44 f. 1        "Witchery of Love" circa 1934
- b. 44 f. 2-3        *Without Barter* 1930s
- b. 44 f. 4        "Women Alone" 1930s
- b. 44 f. 5        "A Woman Takes a Look at the Republic" 1938