

# **Guide to the Alexander Scourby Papers, 1940-1989**

**\*T-Mss 1986-002**

**Billy Rose Theatre Division**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York**

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## Descriptive Summary

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Title:</b>         | <b>Alexander Scourby Papers</b>   |
| <b>Collection ID:</b> | <b>*T-Mss 1986-002</b>  |
| <b>Creator:</b>       | <b>Scourby, Alexander</b>   |
| <b>Extent:</b>        | <b>6.05 linear feet (15 boxes)</b>  |
| <b>Repository:</b>    | <b>Billy Rose Theatre Division.<br/>The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts</b> |

**Abstract:** The Alexander Scourby Papers document the professional career of the prolific actor and narrator through contracts, correspondence, photographs, scripts, and other material. Although he had a long and varied career as an actor and narrator on stage, screen, and radio, Alexander Scourby considered his most important work to be the performances he gave as a voice actor in the Talking Books recordings he made for the American Foundation for the Blind.

## Administrative Information

### Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

### Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

### Preferred Citation

Alexander Scourby Papers, \*T-Mss 1986-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

### Custodial History

The Alexander Scourby Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division in 1986 by Mrs. Alexander Scourby.

### Processing Information

The collection originally was processed and cataloged in 1991; additional material was incorporated into the collection in 2007. Sound recordings and films were separated from the collection and catalogued individually. The Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound holds the sound recordings and films are stored in the Donnell Library Media Center.

## Biographical Note

Although he had a long and varied career as an actor and narrator, Alexander Scourby (1913-1985), considered his most important work to be the performances he gave as a voice actor in the Talking Books recordings he made for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB). Of Greek heritage, Scourby was born in Brooklyn, New York, where his father worked as a restaurateur and commercial baker. In 1931, he graduated from the Brooklyn Manual Training High School. He had developed an interest in writing and performing while in high school, serving as co-editor of the school magazine and yearbook and making his first appearance on stage in a school production of *The Meanest Man in the World*. Scourby briefly attended the University of West Virginia in Morgantown, West Virginia, but returned to New York in February 1932 to help out with the family business following the death of his father.

In 1933, Scourby became an apprentice with the Civic Repertory Theatre, run by Eva Le Gallienne, where he received a thorough professional training. He made his Broadway debut in 1936 as the Player King in the Leslie Howard production of *Hamlet*. It was through cast mate, Wesley Addy, that Scourby was introduced to the opportunities offered by the American Foundation for the Blind. Scourby auditioned for the AFB in 1937, and, after playing a few small parts in recordings of plays, he soon found a niche in which he could utilize his impressive speaking voice by reading novels and other works of literature for the Talking Books service. Over the next forty years, he would provide the narration for over 500 books. His best known recording became the full set of the King James version of the Bible (1966).

Scourby also began working extensively in radio during the 1940s, with recurring roles on several soap operas and regular appearances on the NBC weekly religious program, *The Eternal Light*. Scourby also did broadcasts in Greek and English for the Office of War Information during the Second World War. In 1943, he married Lori von Eltz, an actress who went by the professional name of Lori March. The two occasionally worked together on theater, film, and television projects. Scourby remained active in summer stock and New York theater throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Notable productions in which he was featured included Rodney Ackland's adaptation of *Crime and Punishment* (1947) with Claude Rains, *Detective Story* (1949), *Darkness at Noon* (1951), and the Theatre Guild revival of *Saint Joan* (1951) with Uta Hagen.

During the 1950s, Scourby began to work more often as an actor in films, frequently playing villains. Among his films were *Affair in Trinidad* (1952), *The Big Heat* (1953), *Ransom* (1956), and *Giant* (1956). He also worked increasingly in television as both an actor and narrator. His television credits as an actor include *Playhouse 90*, *Circle Theater*, and *Studio One*. As a narrator, he was associated with the NBC television series, *Project 20*, for many years. Although his work in film and television saw Scourby dividing his time between California and New York, by the 1960s he actively sought employment doing television commercial voice-overs in order to spend more time on the East Coast. In later years, Scourby and his wife maintained a residence in Manhattan and a country home in Newtown, Connecticut.

In addition to continuing to record Talking Books, both for the AFB and Lectern Records, a company he founded, Scourby also worked steadily as a narrator of documentary, educational, and promotional films during the final two decades of his life.

In 1983, he became the host of the public television series, *Live from the Met*. It was while he was in Boston, taping his segments as the host for a National Public Radio broadcast of Handel's oratorio, *Semele*, that Scourby unexpectedly took ill and died.

## Scope and Content Note

The Alexander Scourby Papers document the professional career of the prolific actor and narrator through contracts, correspondence, photographs, scripts, and other material. While the collection does not encompass the first five years of Scourby's acting career, it does otherwise provide a fairly comprehensive picture of his working life. The bulk of this collection is comprised of scripts for a variety of projects in which Scourby was involved either as an actor or voice actor and chiefly covers his work in films, theater, and television. Project files contain some additional information on a similarly wide range of productions. These files vary in content, but may contain clippings, correspondence, financial records, partial scripts, as well as promotional material relating to an individual project. The collection includes a small selection of publicity photographs, as well as snapshots taken in Greece and on the set of the film, *The Glory Brigade* (1953). Correspondence included among the Professional Papers, which largely consists of fan letters from users of Talking Books, attests to the value of Scourby's ground-breaking contributions to the development of this field.

## Organization

The collection is organized into 4 series. They are:

- Series I: Professional Papers, 1940-1989 and undated
- Series II: Photographs, 1951-1982 and undated
- Series III: Project Files, 1956-1984 and undated
- Series IV: Scripts, circa 1941-1985 and undated

## Series Descriptions

### **Series I: Professional Papers, 1940-1989 and undated      3 boxes**

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Professional Papers series consists primarily of correspondence and contracts. The correspondence, which is mainly professional in nature, is composed largely of fan mail and other letters in appreciation of Scourby's work as a narrator for the blind. Also of interest is a set of employment diaries that records Scourby's daily activities in radio broadcasting and recording over a twelve-year period. This series also includes some English translations of writings in Greek apparently made by Scourby. Material that postdates the death of Scourby includes condolence letters and other correspondence sent to his wife.

### **Series II: Photographs, 1951-1982 and undated      1 box**

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Photograph series contains several publicity photographs relating to Alexander Scourby's work as a narrator and actor. Also of note is a small set of candid rehearsal photographs of an unidentified theatrical troupe with Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis in various locations in Greece, including Delphi and the Acropolis in Athens. There is also another selection of snapshots taken on the set of the film, *The Glory Brigade* (1953).

### **Series III: Project Files, 1956-1984 and undated      2 boxes**

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Project Files series documents various types of projects with which Scourby was associated, including live dramatic readings, films, narration, plays, speeches, and Talking Books and other recordings. Material in files may include clippings, correspondence, financial records, promotional materials, and partial scripts.

### **Series IV: Scripts, circa 1941-1985 and undated      9 boxes**

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Scripts series is comprised of complete scripts for many of the productions on which Scourby worked either as an actor or narrator. Scripts cover much of Scourby's work in commercials, films, theater, and television. Also included among the play scripts are actor's sides for roles performed by Scourby in the Broadway productions of *Crime and Punishment* (1949) and *Darkness at Noon* (1951).

| <b>Box/Folder</b>  | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b><u>Series I: Professional Papers, 1940-1989 and undated</u></b> |  |
| <b>Box 1</b>   |  |
| F. 1   | Awards, 1959-1986  |
| F. 2   | Condolences and memorial tributes, 1985                            |
|  | Contracts, 1958-1980 and undated (Also includes some itineraries.) |
| F. 3   | 1958-1962  |
| F. 4   | 1963-1967  |
| F. 5   | 1968-1971  |
| F. 6   | 1973-1980  |
| F. 7   | Undated  |
|  | Correspondence, 1941-1989 and undated (Mainly fan letters.)        |
| F. 8   | 1941-1945  |
| F. 9   | 1946-1949  |
| F. 10  | 1950-1953  |
| F. 11  | 1954-1959  |
| F. 12  | 1960-1962  |
| <b>Box 2</b>   |  |
| F. 1   | 1963-1965  |
| F. 2   | 1966-1969  |
| F. 3   | 1970-1972  |
| F. 4   | 1973   |
| F. 5   | 1974-1975  |
| F. 6   | 1976-1977  |
| F. 7   | 1978-1979  |
| F. 8   | 1980-1989  |
| F. 9   | Undated  |
| <b>Box 3</b>   |  |
|  | Employment diaries, 1940-1952                                      |
| F. 1   | Nov. 1940- Aug. 1943   |
| F. 2   | Aug. 1943- Dec. 1947   |
| F. 3   | 1948-1949  |
| F. 4   | 1950-1952  |
| F. 5   | Financial records, 1961-1980                                       |
| F. 6   | Handwritten notes, undated   |
| F. 7   | Music scores, 1964 and undated                                     |
| F. 8   | Poetry readings, undated   |
| F. 9   | Programs, 1962-1982 and undated                                    |
|  | Promotional materials, 1979-1980 and undated                       |
| F. 10  | Fliers, 1980 and undated   |
| F. 11  | Newsletter, undated  |

| Box/Folder | Description   |
|------------|---|
| F. 12      | Window cards, 1979 and undated  |
| F. 13      | Pronunciation guides, undated   |
| F. 14      | Schedules, undated  |
|            | Translations and writings, 1951 and undated   |
| F. 15      | Excerpts from <i>The Art of the Actor</i> by C. Coquelin, 1951 (Translation by Elsie Fogerty; inscribed by Margaret Webster.) |
| F. 16      | <i>Melissa</i> by Nikos Kazantzakis, undated  |
| F. 17      | Short stories in Greek, undated (Includes <i>Salvatores Dei</i> by Nikos Kazantzakis.)  |
| F. 18      | <i>Train Ride</i> , undated (Unidentified typescript.)  |

**Series II: Photographs, 1951-1982 and undated**

**Box 4**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| F. 1 | American Foundation for the Blind, undated                              |
| F. 2 | Connecticut Public Television, 1976                                     |
| F. 3 | Coordinating Committee for Ellis Island, 1982                           |
| F. 4 | Delphi rehearsal, 1951 (Contact sheets with Katina Paxinou and others.) |
| F. 5 | Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1963                                    |
| F. 6 | Fred Weinberg Productions, circa 1975                                   |
| F. 7 | <i>The Glory Brigade</i> , circa 1953 (Snapshots from film shoot.)      |
| F. 8 | <i>The Immortal Showboat</i> , 1965                                     |
| F. 9 | Unidentified, undated   |

**Series III: Project Files, 1956-1984 and undated**

**Box 5**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
|       | Dramatic readings, 1967-1984 and undated    |
| F. 1  | John Keats program, undated                 |
| F. 2  | King Solomon and King David, undated        |
| F. 3  | <i>Love's Courage</i> , undated             |
| F. 4  | Promotional materials, 1967-1984            |
| F. 5  | <i>Tall Tales of America</i> , undated      |
| F. 6  | Walt Whitman program                        |
| F. 7  | <i>Walt Whitman's America</i> , 1968        |
|       | Films, 1963-1976                            |
| F. 8  | Bible stories, 1976                         |
| F. 9  | <i>Dusquesne, Today and Tomorrow</i> , 1963 |
|       | Narration, 1964-1984 and undated            |
| F. 10 | <i>Le Carnival des Animaux</i> , undated    |
| F. 11 | Charles Ives gala, 1984                     |
| F. 12 | Futurama ride, 1965                         |
| F. 13 | <i>King David</i> , 1976                    |
|       | Plays, 1965-1967 and undated                |

| Box/Folder  | Description  |
|---|--|
| F. 14   | <i>Galileo</i> , undated                                       |
| F. 15   | <i>Sparks Fly Upward</i> , 1965-1967                           |
|   | Speeches, undated  |
| F. 16   | The Players Club, undated                                      |
| F. 17   | Requiem Mass, undated  |
|   | Talking Books and other recordings, 1965-1972 and undated      |
| F. 18   | American Foundation for the Blind brochures, 1966-1968         |
| F. 19   | Bible stories, undated   |
| F. 20   | <i>Hamlet</i> , undated  |
| F. 21   | <i>Many Voices</i> , undated (Promotional record.)             |
| F. 22   | <i>Oratory</i> , undated                                       |
| F. 23   | Walt Whitman, 1965-1972  |
| <b>Box 6</b>  |  |
| F. 1  | <i>Walt Whitman Anthology</i> , 1969                           |
| F. 2  | World War II album, 1960                                       |
|   | Television, 1956-1984 and undated                              |
| F. 3  | <i>Connecticut Profiles</i> , 1978                             |
| F. 4  | <i>Live from the Met</i> , undated (Carmen.)                   |
| F. 5  | <i>Merton</i> , 1984   |
| F. 6  | Metropolitan Opera Centennial Gala, 1983                       |
| F. 7  | <i>A Month in the Country</i> , 1962-1968 (Financial records.) |
| F. 8  | <i>Project Twenty</i> , 1956-1962 (Promotional materials.)     |
| <b><u>Series IV: Scripts, circa 1941-1985 and undated</u></b> |  |
| <b>Box 7</b>  |  |
|   | Commercials, 1961-1985 and undated                             |
|   | Radio, 1975-1985   |
| F. 1  | Columbia Savings, 1985   |
| F. 2  | Kingsmill on the James, 1975                                   |
| F. 3  | Parade of Homes, 1984  |
| F. 4  | TWA, 1985  |
| F. 5  | Walk-in clinic, 1984   |
| F. 6  | Young & Rubicam West, 1979                                     |
|   | Television, 1961-1976 and undated                              |
| F. 7  | First National Bank of Saint Paul, undated                     |
| F. 8  | Go for the Gold, 1976  |
| F. 9  | Hospital Council, 1964   |
| F. 10   | Just Around the Corner, undated                                |
| F. 11   | Micrin, 1961   |
| F. 12   | Take Time for Your Teeth, 1961                                 |

| Box/Folder   | Description  |
|--------------|--|
| F. 13        | Times Mirror Cable Television, undated<br>Films, circa 1941-1984 and undated<br>As an Actor, circa 1941-1960 and undated |
| F. 14        | <i>Affair in Trinidad</i> , 1952   |
| F. 15        | <i>Baptism of Fire</i> , 1952  |
| F. 16        | <i>The Big Heat</i> , 1953   |
| F. 17        | <i>Castle Kate</i> , 1952  |
| F. 18        | <i>Detective Story</i> , circa 1941 (Actor's side for character of Tammy Chacopeddi only.)                               |
| <b>Box 8</b> |  |
| F. 1         | <i>Devil at Four O'Clock</i> , 1960  |
| F. 2         | <i>Fearful Decision</i> , 1955 (Released in 1956 as <i>Ransom</i> .)   |
| F. 3         | <i>The Golden Sword</i> , undated  |
| F. 4         | <i>The Happiest Man on Earth</i> , undated (MGM film short.)   |
| F. 5         | <i>Magic Lady</i> , 1952   |
| F. 6         | <i>Me and the Colonel</i> , 1957   |
| F. 7         | <i>Sign of the Pagan</i> , 1953  |
| F. 8         | <i>The Silver Chalice</i> , 1954   |
| <b>Box 9</b> |  |
| F. 1         | <i>Ten Years a Counterspy</i> , 1959<br>As a Narrator, 1963-1984 and undated   |
| F. 2         | Bravo Film introductions, 1984   |
| F. 3         | <i>A Bridge Across Time</i> , 1978   |
| F. 4         | <i>China!</i> , 1965   |
| F. 5         | <i>For Everything a Season</i> , 1984  |
| F. 6         | <i>If You Don't Come in Sunday, Don't Come in Monday</i> , undated   |
| F. 7         | Jack & Jill sales film   |
| F. 8         | <i>Man in His Environment</i> , 1975 (Field Museum.)   |
| F. 9         | <i>Oceanography: Science for Survival</i> , 1963 Oct. 25 (U. S. Naval training film.)                                    |
| F. 10        | <i>Paradise Regained</i> , 1976 (Dominican Republic.)  |
| F. 11        | <i>Pershing: Road to 4 Corners</i> , undated   |
| F. 12        | <i>Polaris: Time for Survival</i> , 1960 Dec. 29 (U. S. Naval training film.)  |
| F. 13        | Pope John the 23 <sup>rd</sup> , undated<br><i>Profiles in American Art</i> , 1982 and undated                           |
| F. 14        | <i>Edward Fraughton: Of Heroes and Horses</i> , 1982   |
| F. 15        | <i>George Carlson</i> , undated  |
| F. 16        | <i>Sergei Bongart</i> , undated  |
| F. 17        | Royal Viking Line, 1984  |
| F. 18        | St. Augustine Visitor film scripts, undated  |

| Box/Folder    | Description  |
|---------------|--|
| F. 19         | Samuel May Williams project, 1984  |
| F. 20         | <i>To Build and Maintain</i> , undated (U. S. Naval training film.)  |
| F. 21         | <i>Toscanini</i> , 1985  |
| F. 22         | <i>Treasure!</i> , 1976  |
| F. 23         | <i>The Tree of Survival</i> , 1963   |
| F. 24         | <i>Two Orchestras</i> , 1965 (Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Warsaw Philharmonic.)  |
| F. 25         | <i>Year of Disaster</i> , 1965 (Promotional film for Caterpillar Tractor company.)   |
| <b>Box 10</b> |  |
|               | Plays, 1946-1984 and undated   |
| F. 1          | <i>The Burnt Flower-Bed</i> , undated  |
| F. 2          | <i>Candida</i> , undated   |
| F. 3          | <i>Charlotte</i> , 1978  |
| F. 4          | <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , undated (Sides for Dmitri Prokovich Razoumikhin.)  |
| F. 5          | <i>Darkness at Noon</i> , undated (Sides for Ivanoff.)   |
| F. 6          | <i>An Evening of Bernard Shaw with Alexander Scourby and Lori March</i> , undated  |
| F. 7          | <i>A Flag is Born</i> , 1946   |
| F. 8          | <i>The Gendarme in New York</i> , undated  |
| F. 9-10       | <i>The Hemingway Play</i> , undated (Different versions.)  |
| <b>Box 11</b> |  |
| F. 1          | <i>The Invitation</i> , 1969   |
| F. 2          | <i>The Late Christopher Bean</i> , undated   |
| F. 3          | <i>The Sea Gull</i> , 1963 and undated<br>1963 (Inscribed to Scourby and his wife by the translators, Katya Sergava and Bernard Szyner.) |
| F. 4          | Undated (Directed by John Houseman.)   |
| F. 5          | <i>Sounding Brass</i> , 1975   |
| F. 6          | <i>Sparks Fly Upward</i> , undated   |
| F. 7          | <i>A Terrible Saint</i> , undated  |
| F. 8          | <i>Three Sisters</i> , 1984 (Translated by Lanford Wilson.)  |
| <b>Box 12</b> |  |
| F. 1-2        | <i>Tovarich: A Musical Comedy</i> , undated (2 versions.)  |
| F. 3          | <i>The Victors</i> , undated   |
| F. 4          | <i>Vivat! Vivat Regina!</i> , undated  |
| F. 5          | <i>A Whitman Portrait</i> , undated  |
|               | Television, 1956-1985 and undated  |
| F. 6          | <i>Americans: A Portrait in Verse</i> , 1962   |
| F. 7          | <i>Arts and the Gods</i> , 1957-1958   |
| F. 8          | <i>Back in the Thirties</i> , 1956   |

| Box/Folder    | Description  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Box 13</b> |  |
|               | <i>The Body Human</i> , 1978-1982                                |
| F. 1          | <i>The Journey Within</i> , 1982                                 |
| F. 2          | <i>The Red River</i> , 1978                                      |
| F. 3          | <i>The Sexes II</i> , 1980                                       |
| F. 4          | <i>Call to Freedom</i> , 1956                                    |
| F. 5          | <i>Christmas in England</i> , undated                            |
| F. 6          | <i>The Coming of Christ</i> , 1960                               |
| F. 7          | <i>Cousteau: Mississippi</i> , 1985                              |
| F. 8          | <i>Destiny's Tot</i> , 1960                                      |
| F. 9          | <i>Discovery</i> , 1973  |
| F. 10         | English language documentary, 1977                               |
| F. 11         | <i>The Eternal Light</i> , 1963                                  |
| F. 12         | <i>Golden Spring</i> , 1974                                      |
| F. 13         | <i>The Great War</i> , 1956                                      |
| F. 14         | <i>He is Risen</i> , 1962  |
| F. 15         | <i>The Hemingway Play</i> , 1975 (Hollywood Television Theatre.) |
| <b>Box 14</b> |  |
| F. 1          | <i>The Human Dimension Presents Goya</i> , undated               |
| F. 2          | <i>The Inheritance</i> , 1965                                    |
| F. 3          | <i>The Innocent Years</i> , 1957                                 |
| F. 4          | <i>The Law and the Prophets</i> , 1965                           |
| F. 5          | <i>Legacy</i> , 1973   |
| F. 6          | <i>Life in the Thirties</i> , 1959                               |
| F. 7          | <i>The Lincoln Murder Case</i> , 1961                            |
| F. 8          | <i>Medical Milestones V: Mental Illness</i> , undated            |
| F. 9          | <i>Meet Mr. Lincoln</i> , 1959                                   |
|               | <i>Meeting of Minds</i> , 1978                                   |
| F. 10         | Show 211, 1978 (10 <sup>th</sup> draft.)                         |
| F. 11         | Show 212, 1978 (6 <sup>th</sup> draft.)                          |
| <b>Box 15</b> |  |
| F. 1          | <i>Merton</i> , undated  |
| F. 2          | <i>Miraculous Machines</i> , 1985                                |
| F. 3          | <i>Nightmare in Red</i> , 1955                                   |
| F. 4          | <i>Once Upon a World</i> , 1970                                  |
| F. 5          | <i>The Other Eden</i> , 1978                                     |
| F. 6          | <i>Primal Man: The Killer Instinct</i> , 1973                    |
| F. 7          | <i>Time and the Cities</i> , undated                             |
| F. 8          | <i>La Traviata</i> at the Metropolitan Opera, 1981               |
| F. 9          | <i>The Twisted Cross</i> , 1956                                  |

| Box/Folder | Description                         |
|------------|-------------------------------------|
| F. 10      | <i>Victory at Sea</i> , 1960        |
| F. 11      | <i>Walk Beside Me</i> , 1964        |
| F. 12      | <i>You've Got a Right</i> , undated |