Summary

Creator: Hunter, Alberta 
Title: Alberta Hunter papers 
Date: 1919-1986 
Size: 10 linear feet 
Source: Gift, Cook, Gerald, 1988 


Access: Advance notice required. 

Conditions Governing Access: 
Lyrics, may not be hand copied or photocopied. 
Music, may be handcopied or photocopied by obtaining written permission of the publisher and/or executor of the Hunter estate. 

Preferred citation: Alberta Hunter papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library 

Creator History 
Blues singer Alberta Hunter debuted in Chicago at age fifteen in 1912, toured throughout the world and sang leading roles in Europe and on Broadway. Born in 1895 in Memphis, Tennessee, she appeared in top Chicago nightclubs, including the Dreamland Cafe, where she shared the spotlight with the King Oliver Band. In 1921 Hunter made her first recording on the Black Swan label with her own song, "Down Hearted Blues." She replaced Bessie Smith in the leading role of the musical, "How Come?,"
and shortly thereafter she toured in Europe, which included a leading role in the London production of "Showboat" (1927) along with Paul Robeson. This marked the beginning of a very successful European career which encompassed recordings as well as a role in England's first color film, "Radio Parade of 1935." From this time on Hunter made her home in England and France and developed a sophisticated cabaret act which she took throughout Europe and the Middle East.

With the advent of World War II Hunter returned to the United States and volunteered to headline a 1945 United Service Organizations (USO) tour to Europe, Japan and Korea. After appearances in a 1954 revival of "Mamba's Daughters" with Ethel Waters, and the unsuccessful production of "Mrs. Patterson," starring Eartha Kitt, Hunter retired from the entertainment field.

In 1955, at the age of 60, she began working as a volunteer at the Joint Diseases Hospital in Harlem, then embarked on her second career as a practical nurse at the Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island in New York City, where she worked for twenty years before retiring.

Hunter returned to music in 1977, in her eighties, and again recorded extensively, appeared on radio and television programs, sang on film tracts, filled long engagements in New York nightclubs, and travelled to Paris, London and Brazil. Alberta Hunter died in 1984, six months before her ninetieth birthday.

Scope and Content Note
The Alberta Hunter Papers consist of personal and professional papers documenting Hunter's singing and nursing careers. Her personal papers consist of reminiscences, family correspondence (1964-1985), personal correspondence (1924-1985), passports, financial records and address books. Hunter's singing career is documented by correspondence including letters from Ethel Waters, Eubie Blake and blues pianist Lovie Austin with whom Hunter recorded in her early years. The soundtrack album from the film, "Remember My Name" featuring Alberta Hunter is represented by correspondence and songs. There are contracts for performances, recordings, publication of her songs, television, radio, royalties and copyright registration. Her popularity is documented by fan mail (1937 and 1952, 1977-1984). The collection also contains a large body of holograph lyrics by Hunter in addition to some manuscript music by Hunter and other composers such as Eubie Blake. There are programs and broadsides (1931-1940, 1979-1985), printed material, lists of Hunter's unpublished and published songs, notes on issues and sales of her recordings and schedules of performances. Abundant news clippings discuss her singing career (1924-1986). One of two scrapbooks provides information on her activities of the early 1920's as well as on her European career in general, USO Camp Show tours, her 1930's NBC radio series and her appearances with Ethel Waters in the 1954 revival of "Mamba's Daughters," Another scrapbook is devoted to the 1923 musical revue "How Come?" in which Hunter appeared at both the Apollo and Lafayette Theaters. Her twenty-year career as a licensed practical nurse is represented by her school examination papers and several notebooks.

Arrangement: Organized into three series: I Personal Papers; II Professional Papers - Singing Career; III Professional Papers - Nursing Career

Key Terms
Subjects
African American singers
African Americans in medicine
African Americans in the performing arts
Blues (Music)
Blues musicians
Lyricists
Practical nurses
Women singers

**Titles**
Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**
Scrapbooks
Songs

**Names**
Hunter, Alberta
Austin, Lovie
Blake, Eubie, 1883-1983
Waters, Ethel, 1896-1977