



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**

1925-1983

Sc MG 336

## Summary

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

**Title:** Katherine Handy Lewis papers

**Date:** 1925-1983

**Size:** 2.5 linear feet

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

**Abstract:** The Katharine Handy Lewis Papers document some of Mrs. Lewis' personal and professional interests and include material relating to her father and to the Handy Brothers Music Company. Papers pertaining to Mrs. Lewis consist of biographical information, correspondence, printed material and financial records concerning her musical endeavors, but do not reflect her presidency of the Handy Brothers Music Company. Family papers include financial and legal records in addition to correspondence between W.C. Handy and Mrs. Lewis and others, 1939-1957. Of special interest are a memorandum of agreement between Handy and E.A. Niles to collaborate on a collection of blues (1925), a legal document referring to W.C. Handy's estate; and printed material especially 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 (1973), correspondence about issuing a commemorative stamp, and undated writings of W.C. Handy. Records of the Handy Brothers Music Company consist of sheet music published by the company, some written by Mrs. Lewis; correspondence, 1958-1981; a catalog of music, 1949; 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 features W.C. Handy, among others, 1978.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. To request access to materials in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, please visit: [http://archives.nypl.org/scm/request\\_access](http://archives.nypl.org/scm/request_access)

**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

## Creator History

Katherine 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. Mrs. 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 1930, Mrs. 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 Brothers Music Company, of which she was president for a time. Mrs. Lewis died in 1982.

## Scope and Content Note

The Katharine Handy Lewis Papers document some of Mrs. Lewis' personal and professional interests and include material relating to her father and to the Handy Brothers Music Company. Papers pertaining to Mrs. Lewis consist of biographical information, correspondence, printed material and financial records concerning her musical endeavors, but do not reflect her presidency of the Handy Brothers Music Company. Family papers include financial and legal records in addition to correspondence between W.C. Handy and Mrs. Lewis and others, 1939-1957. Of special interest are a memorandum of agreement between Handy and E.A. Niles to collaborate on a collection of blues (1925), a legal document referring to W.C. Handy's estate; and printed material especially 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 (1973), correspondence about issuing a commemorative stamp, and undated writings of W.C. Handy. Records of the Handy Brothers Music Company consist of sheet music published by the company, some written by Mrs. Lewis; correspondence, 1958-1981; a catalog of music, 1949; 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 features W.C. Handy, among others, 1978.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American composers  
African American musicians  
African American singers

### Titles

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Sheet music

### Names

Handy, W. C. (William Christopher), 1873-1958  
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Lewis, Katherine Handy, 1902-1982  
Handy Bros. Music Co.