



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

Guide to the

**Odetta papers**

ca. 1960-1998

Sc MG 317

## Summary

**Creator:** Odetta, 1930-2008

**Title:** Odetta papers

**Date:** ca. 1960-1998

**Source:** Gift, Odetta, 1998

**Abstract:** The Odetta Papers document her career as a folk singer and entertainer. The collection includes contracts, sheet music, correspondence, press materials, programs, flyers, posters, itineraries, travel documents, financial records, record company and management records, and clippings. There are two series, Personal papers and Professional papers, the latter constituting the larger of the two. The Personal papers series, ca. 1956-1991 (2.4 lin. ft.), includes six subseries, Biographical information; Calendars and journals; Writing; Interviews; Awards; and Correspondence. The Professional papers, ca. 1956-1990s (9.4 lin. ft.), are divided into five subseries: Music; Record companies, Performances; Financial records; and Memorabilia. The Performances subseries is further delineated into five subseries: Contracts; Programs; Reviews; Other works; and Correspondence.

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**Language of the Material:** English

## Creator History

Folk singer Odetta (née Odetta Holmes, aka Odetta Felious) is one of the best-known African-American

folk singers in the United States. Born in Alabama and raised in Los Angeles, Odetta was trained for a classical and operatic career at Los Angeles City College when a visit to a San Francisco coffee house featuring folk music awakened an interest in the young singer. Following a long engagement at the Tin Angel in San Francisco, she was booked at The Blue Angel in New York City where she was embraced by the Greenwich Village folk community. Shortly thereafter she appeared with Harry Belafonte at Carnegie Hall and with Pete Seeger at Town Hall.

Odetta is credited as being an important figure in the American folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, and was a formative influence on artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Janis Joplin. She has recorded over thirty albums, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts in 1999, and was nominated for a Grammy award for her album, "Gonna Let It Shine" in 2007.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Odetta Papers document her career as a folk singer and entertainer. The collection includes contracts, sheet music, correspondence, press materials, programs, flyers, posters, itineraries, travel documents, financial records, record company and management records, and clippings. There are two series, Personal papers and Professional papers, the latter constituting the larger of the two. The Personal papers series, ca. 1956-1991 (2.4 lin. ft.), includes six subseries, Biographical information; Calendars and journals; Writing; Interviews; Awards; and Correspondence. The Professional papers, ca. 1956-1990s (9.4 lin. ft.), are divided into five subseries: Music; Record companies, Performances; Financial records; and Memorabilia. The Performances subseries is further delineated into five subseries: Contracts; Programs; Reviews; Other works; and Correspondence.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American women entertainers  
African American women musicians  
African American women singers  
Black author  
Folk music -- United States  
Folk singers -- United States  
Human rights workers -- United States  
Musicians -- United States  
Women composers -- United States  
Women singers -- United States

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Flyers  
Sheet music

### **Names**

Odetta, 1930-2008

## Container List

### Personal papers ca. 1956 - 1991

#### Biographical information ca. 1958 - 1980s

The Biographical information subseries, ca. 1958-1980s (.3 lin. ft.), includes biographical sketches, obituaries, a will, a passport, and identification cards.

- b. 1 f. 1-2      **General**
- b. 1 f. 3      **Last will and testament**
- b. 1 f. 4      **Passport and identification cards 1958**
- b. 1 f. 5      **Minter, Iverson "Louisiana Red" (restricted)**

#### Calendars and journals 1960s - 1990s

The Calendars and journals subseries, 1960s-1990s (.8 lin. ft.), contains a substantial amount of both personal and professional information about the musician's life at home and on the road. The materials detail her thoughts about her work, venues, and other musicians. Some materials were found loose and have been filed within the appropriate year span. A small file for Odetta's third husband, Iverson "Louisiana Red" Minter, is also filed here but restricted.

- b. 1 f. 6-7      **1960s**
- b. 1 f. 8-9      **1970s**
- b. 1 f. 10      **1980 - 1983**
- b. 1 f. 11      **1984 - 1985**
- b. 1 f. 12      **1986**
- b. 1 f. 13      **1987**
- b. 1 f. 14-15    **1989 - 1991**
- b. 1 f. 16      **undated**
- b. 2 f. 1-2      **Loose pages and notes undated**
- b. 2 f. 3      **Writing 1960s**

A sampling of the musician's Writings, ca. 1960s, (1 folder) can be found here; they include lyrics by others and notes about performances

- b. 2 f. 4-5      **Interviews 1980s - 1990**

The Interviews subseries, ca. 1980s-1990 (2 folders), includes transcripts for an undated interview with writer Ben Page for an unnamed publication in the 1970s; and another with Charles J. Fuss for *Goldmine*, a music magazine in 1990, as well as published interviews in magazines and newspapers.

- b. 2 f. 6      **Awards 1975 - 1990**

The Awards subseries, 1975-1990 (1 folder), contains a sample of letters, programs, and certificates pertaining to awards Odetta received in the 1970s and 1990s, as well as material related to her Honorary Doctorate of Arts from Middlebury College in 1990.

Personal papers (cont.)

Correspondence 1960s - 1990s

The last subseries, Correspondence, 1969-1990s (1 lin. ft.), consists of letters from her husbands, Daniel Gordon and Gary Shead; her mother, Flora Felious; friends; admirers; and paramours. The correspondence with her husbands is restricted.

Family

- b. 2 f. 7 Felious, Flora
- b. 2 f. 8 Gordon, Daniel (restricted)
- b. 2 f. 9 Shead, Garry (restricted)

Friends and associates

- b. 2 f. 10 Adkin, Linn (nee Phillips)
- b. 2 f. 11-12 Nicks, Beverley 1960s - 1970s
- b. 2 f. 13 Oshiro, Kenichi
- b. 2 f. 14-15 Starks, Michael
- b. 2 f. 16 Werner, T. G
- b. 2 f. 17 1950s
- b. 2 f. 18-19 1960s
- b. 2 f. 20 1970s
- b. 2 f. 21-22 1980s
- b. 3 f. 1-2 1990s
- b. 3 f. 3-5 undated
- b. 3 f. 6 Letters sent
- b. 3 f. 7 Writings sent to Odetta
- b. 3 f. 8 Astrology

Professional papers ca. 1956 - 1990s

Music 1960s - 1980s

The Music subseries, 1960s-1980s (.5 lin. ft), contains material written, arranged and/or performed by Odetta, as well as music collected by her, or sent to her, which may have never been performed. Some of the sheet music and scores have been annotated by Odetta. There is a file called "lyrics", some of which are in Odetta's handwriting, and many by others (more lyrics can be found in the Writing file in the Personal series.) Also included here are songbooks featuring songs written or recorded by Odetta, as well as a file of playlists of songs for concerts.

- b. 4 f. 1 Lyrics and music notebooks 1979
- b. 4 f. 2 Lyrics by various writers undated
- b. 4 f. 3 Concert play lists undated
- b. 4 f. 4 Written or arranged by Odetta
- Manuscript music
- b. 4 f. 5 Boyd, Peter
- b. 4 f. 6 Brubeck, Dave
- b. 4 f. 7 Delaplain, Mary Kathryn
- b. 4 f. 8 James, Bob
- b. 4 f. 9 Lewis, Max

Professional papers (cont.)

Music (cont.)

Manuscript music (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 10 Reynolds, Malvina
- Sheet music
- b. 4 f. 11 Baron, Steve
- b. 4 f. 12 Brand, Oscar
- b. 4 f. 13 Chapin, Harry
- b. 4 f. 14 Hughes, Langston
- b. 4 f. 16 Johnson, Hall
- b. 4 f. 17 Lightfoot, Gordon
- b. 4 f. 18 Monschein, R. Cameron
- b. 4 f. 19 Robinson, Earl and Millard Lampell
- b. 4 f. 20 Robinson, Earl and John Latouche
- b. 4 f. 21 Rodgers, Richard
- b. 4 f. 22 Thomas, Gordon
- b. 4 f. 23 Thall, Peter Morgan
- b. 4 f. 24 The Folk Music Scene (various artists) 1968
- b. 4 f. 25 The Folk Singers Song Bag, vol. 2 (various artists) 1963
- b. 4 f. 26 Folk Music Yearbook of Artists 1964
- b. 4 f. 27-28 Photocopied sheet music, writers unknown (annotated)
- b. 4 f. 29 Photocopied sheet music, various writers (annotated)
- b. 4 f. 30 Photocopied sheet music, composers unknown  
Includes one score by Gershwin.
- b. 4 f. 31 Duplicates

Record companies 1960s - 1980s

Odetta recorded for several different record companies, 1960s-1980s (.5 lin. ft.), over the course of her 50 years in the music business. There are files for over a dozen record companies, comprised of contracts, royalty statements, and lawsuits. There is also a file for ASCAP containing royalty statements. Other general royalty statements can be found in the Financial section.

- b. 4 f. 32 ABC Records
- b. 4 f. 33 Aspen Records
- b. 4 f. 34 Broadcast Music
- b. 4 f. 35 CBS
- b. 4 f. 36 Clara Music, Inc
- b. 4 f. 37 Elektra Corporation
- b. 4 f. 38 Fantasy Records
- b. 4 f. 39 MGM Records
- b. 4 f. 40 Polydor
- b. 4 f. 41 RCA Records
- b. 4 f. 42 Riverside Records
- b. 4 f. 43 Rose Quartz Records
- b. 4 f. 44 Sanga Music, Inc

Professional papers (cont.)  
Record companies (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 45 Supreme Sound Music
- b. 4 f. 46 Universal Music
- b. 4 f. 47 Vanguard Music
- b. 4 f. 48 Warner Brothers Music
- b. 4 f. 49 Whap Enterprises, Inc
- b. 4 f. 50 ASCAP statements

#### Performances 1953 - 1991

The largest and most substantive part of the series is the Performances subseries, 1953-1991 (5 lin. ft.). These records span Odetta's career from the early 1950s, and contain contracts; programs; posters; itineraries; reviews; fan mail; and other promotional material for performances nationally and internationally.

The Contracts section offers a fairly comprehensive view of Odetta's performances beginning in the 1960s, and it illuminates her popularity in specific states and countries. These files contain contracts for national and international performances from 1960-1989. The file Belafonte Enterprises concerns Odetta's duet with Belafonte, *Hole in the Bucket* (1960), and her appearances on his television show, *Tonight with Belafonte*. (Scripts for her Emmy Award-winning appearance on *Tonight* are filed in the Other Works section.) Two of her management companies, Kazuko Hillyer International (1978-1989), and the William Morris Agency (1960-1961), are represented here, as well as files for managers Leonard Rosenfeld (1980-1986) and Douglas A. Yeager (1980-1984). Files for commissioned work, cancelled contracts, and miscellaneous contracts are also in this series.

Augmenting the Contract section are the Performance and Reviews files. The Performance files, are comprised primarily of programs and fliers for national and international performances nationally and internationally beginning in the 1950s. The national performances primarily consist of solo concerts. The international files include information for concert tours in Australia, Austria, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Spain, and other countries in the late 1960s through the 1980s. The Reviews section begins in 1953 and ends in the 1990s, and contains newspaper and magazine reviews of Odetta's performances, the majority of which were overwhelmingly glowing.

Odetta's talents as a singer and musician led to other performing opportunities in film and theater as well as employment as a teacher. The Other Works section contains scripts and files for several films and television appearances including *Sanctuary* (1961), and the television movie *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974). There are a number of scripts for network shows and specials such as *Tonight With Belafonte* (1959-1960), *The Ford Show* (1960), and the PBS series *With Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee* (1980). There are also scripts that were sent to Odetta, some of which are undated. It is unclear whether these scripts evolved into productions, or if Odetta was involved.

Two productions featuring Odetta in starring roles, *New Orleans* and *The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, are highlighted in this section. The file for *New Orleans* (1982), an opera written by Toni Morrison, includes a letter from Morrison, a program, and reviews of the play. The file for *The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (1977) written by Paul Zindel, contains a program and reviews. A small file labeled "Public Radio" (1974-1978) containing a memorandum and related materials about a black history program featuring Odetta and John Lee Hooker, produced by National Public Radio in 1978, also can be found here.

Odetta's forays into teaching are represented in three sets of files, "Arts for Transit" (undated), Evergreen State College (1982), and Middlebury College (1988-1990). These files contain letters from the schools and students; student files; programs; notes; and related school information. There is also a file of student letters (1968), but no school is identified.

The Correspondence section includes letters focusing on Odetta's professional life, information primarily about scheduling performances; legal matters; thank you cards from event hosts; fan mail; and a few copies of letters sent by Odettas.

#### Contracts

- b. 5 f. 1 Belafonte Enterprises

Professional papers (cont.)

Performances (cont.)

Contracts (cont.)

Domestic

- b. 5 f. 2 1960
- b. 5 f. 3 1961
- b. 5 f. 4 1962
- b. 5 f. 5 1962 - 1969
- b. 5 f. 6 Completed 1970 - 1971
- b. 5 f. 7 Completed 1972 - 1973
- b. 5 f. 8 Completed 1974 - 1975
- b. 5 f. 9 Completed 1976 - 1977
- b. 5 f. 10 Completed, US and Canada 1979
- b. 5 f. 11 Completed 1980
- b. 5 f. 12 1982 - 1989
- b. 5 f. 13 Cancelled
- b. 5 f. 14 Miscellaneous

Foreign

- b. 5 f. 15 1962 - 1978
- b. 5 f. 16 Completed 1977

Management

- b. 5 f. 17-18 Kazuko Hillyer International, Inc 1978 - 1989
- b. 5 f. 19 Leonard Rosenfield 1980 - 1986
- b. 5 f. 20 Douglas A. Yeager 1980 - 1984
- b. 5 f. 21 William Morris Agency 1960 - 1961
- b. 5 f. 22 Commissions 1979 - 1982

Programs

National

- b. 6 f. 1-2 1950s
- b. 6 f. 3-6 1960s
- b. 6 f. 7-11 1970s
- b. 6 f. 12 *The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* 1977  
Includes program and reviews.
- b. 6 f. 13-16 1980s
- b. 7 f. 1-5
- b. 7 f. 6 *Morrison, Toni. New Orleans* 1982  
Includes letters, brochure, and reviews.
- b. 7 f. 7-8 1990s
- b. 7 f. 9-10 undated

International

- b. 7 f. 11 Australia 1989
- b. 7 f. 12 Austria 1976
- b. 7 f. 13 Canada 1976 - 1978
- b. 7 f. 14 France
- b. 7 f. 15-16 Japan 1965 - 1978

Professional papers (cont.)

Performances (cont.)

Programs (cont.)

International (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 17 Malaysia
- b. 7 f. 18 Nova Scotia 1977
- b. 7 f. 19 Poland 1977
- b. 8 f. 1 Russia and Austria 1974
- b. 8 f. 2 Spain 1976
- b. 8 f. 3 Sweden 1975 - 1977
- b. 8 f. 4 Switzerland 1976
- b. 8 f. 5 Tel Aviv
- b. 8 f. 6 1950s - 1960s
- b. 8 f. 7 1970s
- b. 8 f. 8 1980s
- b. 8 f. 9 1990s
- b. 8 f. 10 undated

Reviews

- b. 8 f. 11 1953 - 1958
- b. 8 f. 12 1959
- b. 8 f. 13-14 1960
- b. 8 f. 15-16 1961
- b. 8 f. 17 1962
- b. 8 f. 18 1963
- b. 9 f. 1 1964
- b. 9 f. 2 1965
- b. 9 f. 3 1966
- b. 9 f. 4 1967
- b. 9 f. 5 1968 - 1969
- b. 9 f. 6 1970 - 1971
- b. 9 f. 7 1972
- b. 9 f. 8 1973
- b. 9 f. 9 1974
- b. 9 f. 10 1975
- b. 9 f. 11 1976
- b. 9 f. 12 1977 - 1978
- b. 9 f. 13 1978
- b. 9 f. 14 1979
- b. 9 f. 15 1980
- b. 9 f. 16 1981
- b. 9 f. 17 1982
- b. 9 f. 18 1983
- b. 9 f. 19 1984
- b. 9 f. 20 1985
- b. 9 f. 21 1986



Professional papers (cont.)

Performances (cont.)

Reviews (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 22 1987
- b. 9 f. 23 1988 - 1989
- b. 9 f. 24 1990s
- b. 9 f. 25 undated

Other works

Scripts

- b. 10 f. 1 *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* 1974
- b. 10 f. 2 "Black Conversations" 1976
- b. 10 f. 3 "A Celebration With Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee and Friends" undated
- b. 10 f. 4 Channel 13
- b. 10 f. 5 "Feast of Freedom" undated
- b. 10 f. 6-7 *The Ford Show* 1960
- b. 10 f. 8 "The Hanging of Aaron Gibbs" undated
- b. 10 f. 9 "'Iola Leroy', or 'Shadows Uplifted'" 1983
- b. 10 f. 10 "King Oedipus" undated
- b. 10 f. 11 "Taking My Turn" undated
- b. 10 f. 12 "Look! What a Wonder" 1976
- b. 10 f. 13 "Mahalia" undated
- b. 10 f. 14 "Manhattan: Home of Blacks for 3½ Centuries" 1977
- b. 10 f. 15 "Once Upon a Time" 1982
- b. 10 f. 16-17 *Sanctuary* 1960
- b. 10 f. 18 "Something Black" 1976
- b. 10 f. 19 "Songs of the Soul: America's Own Music" undated
- b. 10 f. 20 "Stage Coach Mary" 1974
- b. 10 f. 21 "Take This Hammer" undated
- b. 10 f. 22 *Tonight with Belafonte* 1959 - 1960
- b. 10 f. 23 *With Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee* 1980
- b. 10 f. 24 WGBH 1983  
 Various scripts.
- b. 10 f. 25 Unidentified excerpt undated
- b. 10 f. 26 Miscellaneous
- b. 10 f. 27 Public radio
- Teaching experience
- b. 10 f. 28 Arts for Transit, Metropolitan Transportation Authority undated
- b. 10 f. 29-56 Evergreen State College 1982
- b. 10 f. 57 Middlebury College 1988 - 1990
- b. 10 f. 58 Student letters 1968
- b. 10 f. 59-60 Research 1977 - 1978  
 Includes "The Archive of Folk Song: A 50th Anniversary Celebration" and material on Bessie Smith.

Correspondence

- b. 11 f. 1 Dandetta Productions, Daniel Gordon (artist management) 1960 - 1962

Professional papers (cont.)

Performances (cont.)

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 2        1950s
- b. 11 f. 3-5     1960s
- b. 11 f. 6-8     1970s
- b. 11 f. 9-11    1980s
- b. 11 f. 12-13   1990s
- b. 11 f. 14       Sent
- b. 11 f. 15       undated

Financial records 1950s - 1980s

The Financial Records subseries, 1950s-1980s (.5 lin. ft.), offers a limited look at Odetta's financial profile over the years. Alphabetically arranged by subject, the files are comprised of various expenses and tax information. There are also files with scant documentation for specific entities including Felious Management; Pookie Tree Publishing; Hominy Inc.; American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (1960s-1980s); and the Universal Music Association (1960-1961).

- b. 11 f. 16        American Federation of Television and Radio Artists 1960s - 1980s
- b. 11 f. 17        Analysis of receipts and disbursements 1978 - 1983
- b. 11 f. 18        Banking information
- Expenses
- b. 11 f. 19        1979
- b. 11 f. 20        1980
- b. 11 f. 21        1981
- b. 11 f. 22        1982
- b. 11 f. 23        1983
- b. 11 f. 24        1984
- b. 11 f. 25        1985
- b. 11 f. 26        1986 - 1987
- b. 11 f. 27        undated
- b. 11 f. 28        Felious Management 1977
- b. 11 f. 29        Household employee records 1980 - 1984
- b. 11 f. 30        Hominy, Inc 1965
- b. 11 f. 31        Merrick vs. Gordon 1961
- b. 11 f. 32        Lists
- b. 11 f. 33        Performance payments
- b. 11 f. 34        Permissions 1970s
- b. 11 f. 35        Pookie Tree Publishing 1971 - 1983
- Receipts and disbursements
- b. 11 f. 36        1978 - 1979
- b. 11 f. 37        1980
- b. 11 f. 38        1981
- b. 11 f. 39        1982
- b. 11 f. 40        1983

Professional papers (cont.)

Financial records (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 41      Royalties information
- Tax information
- b. 11 f. 42      1954
- b. 11 f. 43      1965 - 1975
- b. 11 f. 44      1976 - 1986
- b. 11 f. 45      Universal Music Association 1960 - 1961

Memorabilia 1960s - 1980s

The final subseries, Memorabilia, 1960s-1980s (1 lin. ft.), appears to be a mix of materials Odetta collected on various subjects including black memorabilia; folk life; and music research, as well as chapbooks by other authors and newsletters sent to her over the course of her career.

- b. 12 f. 1      Black folk
- b. 12 f. 2-3     Black memorabilia
- b. 12 f. 4     Detroit Phoenix Singers
- b. 12 f. 5     Earl Hooks
- b. 12 f. 6-8    Folk research
- b. 12 f. 9     John Jacob Miles
- b. 12 f. 10    Joseph Mitchell
- b. 12 f. 11-12   Manuscript chapbooks (various authors)
- b. 12 f. 13    Newsletters
- Includes *Folknotes*, *Folkworks Bulletin*, *Sing Out Bulletin*, and *Songsmith Journal*.
- b. 12 f. 14    Plays
- b. 12 f. 15-17   General
- b. 13        Oversize material