



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Nila Mack papers

1910-1953

*T Mss 1953-002

Processed by Ramon Cabrera.

Summary

Creator: Mack, Nila, 1891-1953

Title: Nila Mack papers

Date: 1910-1953

Source: Gift, Elaine Ivans, 1953

Abstract: The Nila Mack papers contain correspondence, personal papers and ephemera, photographs, clippings and scrapbooks. The clippings and scrapbooks provide a complete overview of her life and career and span the years 1910 until her death in 1953.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts 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. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

Conditions Governing Use: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Nila Mack Papers, *T-Mss 1953-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Processing note: Processed by Ramon Cabrera. In 1995, the collection was recatalogued and reorganized and all clippings were photocopied for preservation purposes.

Creator History

Nila Mack was born in Arkansas City, Kansas on October 24, 1891. She was an only child. Her mother was a dancer and ran her own dancing school. Her father was an engineer who died tragically in a train wreck. Upon her father's death, she attended Ferry Hall in Lake Forest, Illinois. After graduating, she

went to Boston and took courses in French, dance, and voice training. She was also a pianist and played in her mother's dancing school. Nila Mack's early career began in vaudeville and as a leading lady in a traveling repertory company. She married her leading man, Roy Briant. When Briant joined Paramount Pictures as a writer, Mack became a member of Nazimova's company. She was in the film titled *War Brides* and also wrote scenarios for screen shorts. She also acted on Broadway and appeared in the plays *Fair and Warmer* and *A Doll's House*. Her husband, Roy Briant, died in 1927 after 13 years of marriage. She was also an actress in the radio program *CBS Radio Guild of the Air*. Nila Mack, returned to Kansas to nurse her ill mother and at that time became the program director of a local station. This was the beginning of her career in radio programming. In 1930, CBS asked her to return and take over the children's program *The Adventures of Helen and Mary* later renamed *Let's Pretend* which she produced for the next 23 years. The show featured dramatizations of classic fairy tales. It was one of the most successful children's shows in radio broadcasting history. Nila Mack received fan mail from youngsters and mothers, some of which was read during the show. From her shows she discovered young talents who became performers, producers, directors, and writers. Nila Mack also produced other radio programs such as *Let Freedom Ring*, *Treasures Next Door*, *Sunday Morning at Aunt Susan's*, *Funny Things*, and *March of Games*. Nila also wrote children's stories for magazines and wrote the book *Animal Allies* and a storybook of *Let's Pretend*. Nila Mack died of a heart ailment in her New York apartment on January 20, 1953. She won numerous awards for *Let's Pretend* as well as individual awards for her accomplishments. During her 23 years in radio she was known as "Fairy Godmother of Radio".

Custodial History

The Nila Mack Papers were donated by Elaine Ivans in 1953.

Scope and Content Note

The Nila Mack Papers consist of correspondence, personal papers, photographs, clippings, and scrapbooks. The clippings and the scrapbook provide a complete overview of her life and career and span 1910 to her death.

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence Series II: Personal Papers Series III: Photographs Series IV: Scrapbooks Series V: Clippings

Key Terms

Subjects

Children's radio programs -- United States
Children's writings -- United States
Radio producers and directors -- United States
Vaudeville

Titles

Let's pretend (Radio program)
War brides (Motion picture)

Names

Mack, Nila, 1891-1953
Briant, Roy
Nazimova, 1879-1945

Container List

Series I: Correspondence 1915-1953 (12 folders)

This series contains correspondence from family, relatives, friends, and colleagues. It documents her career in radio broadcasting and her personal relations with family and friends.

Alphabetical

- b. 1 f. 1 **Correspondence / Mary Boland** (1 folder, 1 letter)
Correspondence written by Mary Boland to Nila Mack.
- b. 1 f. 2 **Correspondence to Roy Briant** (1 folder, 8 letters)
Correspondence between Roy Briant (Nila Mack's husband) and others.
- b. 1 f. 3 **Correspondence / Columbia Broadcasting System, inc.** (1 folder, 3 letters)
Correspondence between Columbia Broadcasting System Inc. (CBS) and Nila Mack.
- b. 1 f. 4 **Correspondence / William Cromwell** (1 folder, 2 letters)
Postcards from William Cromwell to Roy Briant.
- b. 1 f. 5 **Correspondence / Elaine Ivans** (1 folder, 38 letters)
Correspondence between Elaine Ivans (collection donor) and The New York Public Library.
- b. 1 f. 6 **Correspondence / Nila Mack** (1 folder, 2 letters)
Columbia Broadcasting System, inc.
Correspondence from Nila Mack to Clara Rogan and CBS.
- b. 1 f. 7 **Correspondence / Nazimova** (1 folder, 12 letters)
Correspondence from Alla Nazimova to Nila Mack.
- b. 1 f. 8 **Family correspondence / Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Correspondence to Nila Mack from her family.
- b. 1 f. 9 **Fan mail to Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Correspondence with poems written by fans to Nila Mack.
- b. 1 f. 10 **Correspondence "A-Z"** (1 folder)
Mack, Nila, 1891-1953
Miscellaneous correspondence to Nila Mack from fans and friends.
- b. 1 f. 11 **Telegrams to Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Fiske, Minnie Maddern, 1865-1932
Connelly, Edward, 1859-1928
Telegrams to Nila Mack from friends and colleagues.
- b. 1 f. 12 **Fan mail to Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Letters from fans about the radio programs by Nila Mack.

Series II: Personal Papers 1914-1953 (9 folders)

This series contains press releases, programs, calling cards signed by various friends and colleagues, and poetry. It also includes a tribute by Howard Lindsay on the occasion of Nila Mack's death, radio scripts for the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education and *The Adventures of Helen and Mary*, lists of scripts for radio programming, and a handwritten play entitled *Western Farmer and Hero Tramp* dated 1914.

- b. 1 f. 13 **Let's pretend press releases** (1 folder)
Press releases
Press releases from the radio program Let's Pretend.
- b. 1 f. 14 ***Adventures of Helen and Mary (Radio script)*** October 4, 1930 (1 folder)
Script for the radio program *Adventures of Helen and Mary*.

Series II: Personal Papers (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 15-18 **National Advisory Council On Radio In Education (Radio scripts) 1932** (4 folders)
Four C.B.S. scripts, concerning vocational guidance, under the auspices of the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education [February 21, 1932; March 6 and 27, 1932; April 24, 1932].
- b. 1 f. 19 **Radio programming list 1930-1949** (1 folder)
List of scripts used on radio programs.
- b. 1 f. 20 **Death of Nila Mack / Howard Lindsay** (1 folder)
Five page writing by Howard Lindsay about the death of Nila Mack.
- b. 1 f. 21 **Personal papers / Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Personal papers of Nila Mack include poetry, programs, and a handwritten play entitled *Western Farmer and Hero Tramp*.

Series III: Photographs 1916-1948 (2 folders)

This series contains miscellaneous photographs of Nila Mack, her husband Roy Briant, relatives, friends, and colleagues. Also included are photographic stills of the motion picture *War Brides*.

- b. 1 f. 22 **Photographs / Nila Mack** (1 folder)
Miscellaneous photographs of Nila Mack, family, friends, and colleagues.
- b. 1 f. 23 **War brides (Motion picture) 1916** (1 folder)
Silent films
Photographic stills of the silent film *War Brides* starring Nila Mack.

Series IV: Scrapbooks 1932-1948 (2 scrapbooks)

This series contains two scrapbooks that document the career of Nila Mack between 1932-1948. The scrapbooks were photocopied for conservation purposes.

- b. 2 f. 1 **Scrapbook, / Nila Mack 1932-1940** (1 folder)
Scrapbook about the career of Nila Mack and the radio program *Let's Pretend*.
- b. 2 f. 2 **Scrapbook / Nila Mack 1936-1948** (1 folder)
Scrapbook about the career of Nila Mack.

Series V: Clippings 1910-1953 (6 folders)

This series contains clippings about the life and career of Nila Mack. The clippings were photocopied for conservation purposes.

Chronological

- b. 2 f. 3 **Clippings / Nila Mack 1900-1919** (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 4 **Clippings / Nila Mack 1920-1929** (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 5 **Clippings / Nila Mack 1930-1939** (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 6 **Clippings / Nila Mack 1940-1949** (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 7 **Clippings / Nila Mack 1950-1953** (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 8 **Clippings / Nila Mack** (1 folder)