



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Joseph O. Kesselring writings**

1932-1970 [bulk 1930s-1940s]

Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2014.

## Summary

**Creator:** Kesselring, Joseph, 1902-1967

**Title:** Joseph O. Kesselring writings

**Date:** 1932-1970 [bulk 1930s-1940s]

**Size:** 4.62 linear feet (11 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Lewis D. Solomon, 1973.

**Abstract:** Joseph Otto Kesselring (1902-1967) was an American dramatist best known for his successful play *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941). The Joseph O. Kesselring writings date from 1932 to 1970 and contain scripts and short stories.

**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>

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2014.

## Creator History

Joseph Otto Kesselring (1902-1967) was an American dramatist. In 1922, Kesselring taught vocal music and directed stage productions at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas. He left academia after a couple of years to pursue acting and writing. Kesselring wrote short stories, and worked for a few years with an amateur theatrical group in Niagara, New York. In 1933, he settled as a freelance dramatist, and authored twelve original plays during his career. *Aggie Appleby, Maker of Men* (1933) was his first

play to be produced; four other plays were later produced on Broadway: *There's Wisdom in Women* (1935), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), *Four Twelves Are 48* (1951), and *Mother of That Wisdom* (1963). Kesselring is best known for his successful play *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), which was also produced in other countries and adapted to television and film. In 1932, Kesselring married Charlotte Elsheimer. He died in 1967 in New York.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Joseph O. Kesselring writings date from 1932 to 1970 (bulk dates 1930s-1940s) and document his career as an American dramatist. His original writing is represented through scripts and short stories.

*Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941) is the most prominent play in this collection. There are several versions of the script with accompanying edits and notes, including the original "Bodies in Our Cellar" draft. The television adaptation is represented with a script written by Robert Hartung, and rehearsal schedules for the 1962 Hallmark Hall of Fame production. There are also a few published versions of the play, and a program from the 1969 Pitlochry Festival Theatre production.

Scripts for the plays *Appleby*, *Maker of Men* (1933), *There's Wisdom in Women* (1935) *Four Twelves Are 48* (1951), and *Mother of That Wisdom* (1963) are also included in this collection. Kesselring's wife, Charlotte E. Kesselring, annotated many of the scripts to record copyrights, draft dates, and notes about transcriptions.

There are also several short stories typescripts such as "Hills of Kansas," "The Black Puncher," "Heads We Win," and "To Walk the Night." Most of the short stories include a word count and Kesselring's address, but it is not discernible if they were ever published or developed into plays.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged alphabetically by file type: scripts and short stories.

### **Key Terms**

#### **Occupations**

Dramatists  
Playwrights

#### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scripts (documents)  
Short stories

#### **Subjects**

Theater -- New York (State) -- New York

## Container List

### Scripts

- b. 1 f. 9-10 Accidental Angel 1932-1945
- b. 2 f. 1-4 Accidental Angel 1932-1945
  - b. 2 f. 5 Aggie Applely, Maker of Men 1932
- b. 2 f. 6-9 Arsenic and Old Lace 1939
- b. 3 f. 1-9 Arsenic and Old Lace 1939-1969
- b. 3 f. 10-11 Bearded Lady with a Kindly Knife 1963
- b. 4 f. 1-3 Cross-Town 1934-1936
  - b. 4 f. 4 The Devil Chaser 1930s
- b. 4 f. 5-9 Down Pops the Double 1945
- b. 5 f. 1-6 A Frog in His Pocket 1957
- b. 1 f. 1-8 Four Twelves are 48 1950-1951
  - b. 5 f. 7 Hebrews XI. I 1930s
- b. 6 f. 1-7 Identically Yours 1944-1945
  - b. 6 f. 8 In Yonder Shadows 1938
- b. 7 f. 1-2 In Yonder Shadows 1938
- b. 7 f. 3-5 Maggie McGilligan 1942-1943
- b. 7 f. 6-7 Mother of that Wisdom 1964
  - b. 8 f. 1 Mother of that Wisdom 1964
- b. 8 f. 2-4 Solomon's Mother 1947
- b. 8 f. 5-8 Surgery is Indicated 1962-1963
- b. 9 f. 1-8 Surgery is Indicated 1962-1963
- b. 10 f. 1-5 The Temptation of St. Groucho 1952
- b. 10 f. 6-9 There's Wisdom in Women 1933
- b. 11 f. 1-2 The Whirring Death 1933

### Short Stories

- b. 11 f. 3 The Antic Assassins Assist 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 4 The Antic Assassins of Geary 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 5 The Black Puncher 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 6 Cupid Draws a Six-Gun 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 7 Devil of Galapagos 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 8 Frantic Sacrifice 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 9-10 Heads We Win 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 11 Hills of Kansas 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 12 A Hunk of Money 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 13 Jig, Lisp and Amble 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 14 The Law is the Law 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 15 The Light, Returning a Fantasy 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 16 A Matter of Clothes 1930s-1950s

Short Stories (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 17 Puritan Maid 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 18 The Reformation of Mike O'Bannion 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 19 Shootin' It Out Fair An' Square 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 20 Too Old 1930s-1950s
- b. 11 f. 21 To Walk the Night 1930s-1950s