

**MG
524**

ROSE McCLENDON

SCRAPBOOKS

The New York Public Library

**Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture**

**515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10037**

Table of Contents

Preface.....	i
Biography.....	1
Scope and Content.....	3
Container List.....	4

Preface

This inventory was prepared as part of an archival preservation project to arrange, describe and catalog resources essential for the study of the African-American theater history. The necessary staff and supplies for the *Blacks on Stage: African-American Theater Arts Collection Project* were made available through a combination of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the City of New York.

**ROSE McCLENDON (1884-1936). SCRAPBOOKS (1916-1935)
2 boxes. (6 lin. in.).**

Biography

Rose McClendon was one of the most famous black dramatic actresses of the 1920s and 1930s. Although she did not become a professional actor until she was in her thirties, she consistently won critical acclaim for many of her acting roles and influenced the careers of many aspiring black actors of the period.

Rose (Rosalie) V. McClendon was born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1884 and with her parents, Sandy and Lena Jenkins Scott, migrated to New York City around 1890. At the age of twenty she married Dr. Henry Pruden McClendon, a licensed chiropractor, who claimed he supplemented his income by working as a Pullman porter. McClendon's interest in the theatre first found expression in the church where she directed and acted in cantatas at Saint Mark's African Methodist Episcopal Church in Manhattan. In 1916 she won a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts at Carnegie Hall under the tutelage of Franklin Sargent, and subsequently began her stage career.

McClendon made her professional debut in *Justice* (1919-1920), a play starring writer, director, and actor Butler Davenport. Four years later she appeared in *Roseanne* (1924) with Charles Gilpin (and later Paul Robeson). In 1926 she gained prominence for her acting in *Deep River*, where she earned rave reviews, and in Paul Green's Pulitzer prize-winning folk tragedy, *In Abraham's Bosom* that starred Jules Bledsoe in the title role. Her reputation grew with her portrayal of Serena in Dubose and Dorothy Heyward's *Porgy* (1927) for which she received the *Morning Telegraph* Acting Award the following year (along with Ethel Barrymore and Lynn Fontanne). After a long run of one year in New York City, McClendon went on tour with *Porgy* to Chicago (nine weeks), London (approximately six weeks), Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Washington, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Detroit, San Francisco, Los Angeles, the northwest, and Canadian cities. Other plays she appeared in include Green's *House of Connelly* (1931), *Black Souls*, an all black production of *Never No More* and *The Cat and the Canary* (1932), *Brain Sweat* (which had a black cast) and *Roll Sweet Chariot* (1934), and *Panic* (1935). Her last starring role was as Cora in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto* (1935) which ran for 375 performances on Broadway, the second-longest run by a black playwright at that time. Hughes created the role of Cora specifically for her, unfortunately, McClendon left the cast in December when she became ill.

Her love of the theatre inspired McClendon's stewardship of other African American's involvement in the theatre. From 1923 to 1925 McClendon was active in the Ethiopian Art Theatre. Also by the mid-1920s, she was a director for the Negro (Harlem) Experimental Theatre located at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library and, in addition, worked in a supervisory capacity with the Federal Theatre Project

(Negro Unit), ca. 1935-1936. Furthermore, she served as a board member for the Theatre Union, which governed the Civic Repertory Theatre on West 14th Street.

While working with the Federal Theatre Project, McClendon developed her vision of a black theatre company. Together with Dick Campbell she founded the Negro People's Theatre in 1935. Members of the advisory board included: Cheryl Crawford, Clifford Odets, Paul Green, Albert Bein, Countee Cullen, Herbert Kline, and Lena Bernstein. Officers of the small thirty-five member company were: Morris McKenney (chairman and director of the executive board), Campbell (vice chairman), Lena Bernstein (play reader), and Alston Burleigh (musical director). The company produced one play, Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, prior to McClendon's untimely death of pneumonia in 1936. Two years later, Campbell, his wife, actress Muriel Rahn, and George Norford established the Rose McClendon Players in Harlem in her honor.

Scope and Content Note

The Rose McClendon Scrapbooks consists of two volumes, dating from 1916 to 1935, that were donated by her husband, Dr. Henry Pruden McClendon's estate in 1950. They contain articles, reviews of plays, playbills, programs, telegrams, photographs, poems, and correspondence, arranged chronologically by her most ardent supporter and fan, Dr. McClendon. Opening night telegrams were sent to her from Leigh Whipper, Harry Burleigh, Countee Cullen, and Jules Bledsoe as well as her husband; Carl Van Vechten and Walter White, among others, sent letters.

The scrapbooks are arranged by play; volume 1 is dated 1919 to 1931, and volume 2 covers 1932 to 1935. Volume 1, the larger of the two scrapbooks due to its date coverage, contains more reviews of McClendon's work than volume 2. In volume 1, the identification of the newspaper and magazines in which reviews appear is not always available. Most reviews of McClendon's early work, including: *Roseanne* (1924), *Deep River* and *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926); *The Cat and the Canary* and *Porgy* (1927) are from New York newspapers. Reviews in the *Public Ledger* and *The Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), *Providence Journal*, *Variety*, *The Evening Telegram* (Toronto) *Inter-State Tattler*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *McCalls*, *Theatre World*, and the *Tatler* are also represented. Reviews of *Porgy* are more numerous due to its more extensive run. Articles about McClendon, letters, telegrams and poems to her, programs of the plays she appeared in, and photographs are dispersed throughout this volume.

Volume 2, 1932 to 1935, consists of newspaper and magazine reviews covering the latter part of her career in the following productions: *House of Connelly*, *Never No More*, *Black Souls*, *Brain Sweat*, *Roll Sweet Chariot*, *Panic*, and the radio presentation of *John Henry: Black River Giant*. Coverage was provided by New York City newspapers, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Variety*, *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Defender*, *Philadelphia Independent*, the *Toronto Daily Star*, and the *Tatler* for these plays. With the exception of *John Henry*, McClendon usually received over half dozen telegrams for each of the aforementioned productions. Although some plays (*Black Souls* and *Panic*) received negative reviews, McClendon's performances were always highly acclaimed by theatre critics.

Provenance

Gift of Dr. Henry Pruden McClendon's estate
SCM83-21

Processed by Paula Williams
January 1999

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Contents</u>
1	1	Reviews: <i>Pa Williams' Gal</i> <i>White Mule</i> <i>Justice</i> (1919) <i>Roseanne</i> (1924) <i>Deep River</i> (correspondence), <i>In Abraham's Bosom</i> (1926) <i>Porgy</i> (telegrams) (1927) <i>The House of Connelly</i> (1931) Photographs: <i>Deep River</i> , <i>In Abraham's Bosom</i> and <i>Porgy</i> Poems
	2	Reviews: <i>Never No More</i> , <i>Black Souls</i> (1932), <i>Brain Sweat</i> , <i>Roll Sweet Chariot</i> , <i>Panic</i> (1934) and radio adaptation of <i>John Henry: Black River Giant</i> Programs: <i>The House of Connelly</i> , <i>Never No</i> <i>More</i> Telegrams

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers: Rose McClendon Scrapbook

Accession Number: SCM 83-21

Donor: Estate of Dr. Henry Pruden McClendon

Gift X **Purchase**

Date received: unknown

Date transferred: June 20, 2003

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:

Six photographs: 5 play scenes; one of McClendon with bouquet of flowers.