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EARL SYDNOR PAPERS, 1929-1989

Sc MG 196

Bulk Dates:	1945-1985
Extent:	Shelving Unit: 1 archival box, 1 flat box Linear feet: 0.7
Source and Date:	Earl Sydnor, 1983; Lucille Sydnor, June 1990
Processor's Name:	Andrea R. Jackson
Date Finding Aid Completed:	November, 2001
Abstract:	Earl Sydnor, actor, appeared in several plays movies, and television programs. The collection consists of two series, <b>Personal</b> and <b>Professional</b> , including biographical materials, correspondence, programs, reviews, and three scrapbooks documenting his acting career and service in WWII.
Provenance:	The collection was donated by Earl Sydnor in 1983; additional papers were donated by his wife, Lucille Sydnor in 1990.
Organization note:	Collection is organized in two series: PERSONAL and PROFESSIONAL
Access:	Unrestricted access
Reproductions:	All requests subject to limitations noted in divisional policies on reproduction.
Copyright:	Information on copyright (literary rights) available from repository.
Other Source of Description:	RLIN #: NYPW.....
Citation:	The Earl Sydnor Papers, Sc MG 196, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library
Index Terms	
Names:	Earl Sydnor, Katherine Dunham, Ethel Waters
Subject:	Sydnor, Earl L. Performances 1940-1949; Racism Race Relations--20 <sup>th</sup> Century; Actors; African American Actors; Television Actors And Actresses; Motion Picture Actors and Actresses; African American Motion Picture Actors and Actresses; Poets; African American Poets; <i>The American Home</i>

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**Sydnor, Earl (1907-1989). Papers, 1929-1989**  
**1 archival box, 1 flat box; 0.7 linear ft.**

### **Biographical Sketch**

Earl Lawson Sydnor, actor, was born in Wayne, Pennsylvania in 1907, and grew up in Orange, New Jersey. His family moved to Boston where he attended the Dana School for Drama where his acting talent was realized. Two years in succession, Sydnor won the Boston Players Jabberwock Competition until he was asked not to compete for fear that other actors would not run.

Sydnor attended Brookwood College in Katonah, New York on scholarship where he studied labor relations and journalism. He also studied poetry with noted poet and teacher, Robert Hillyer, at Harvard University. Much of his poetry was published in literary magazines such as *The Sign*, a National Catholic magazine, and *The Saturday Evening Quill*, the publication of the Saturday Evening Quill Club of black writers in Boston.

In 1941, Earl married his first wife, Virginia Williams. They settled in New York where he pursued his acting and writing careers.

During the Depression, Sydnor performed with the New Jersey Federal Theatre Company (WPA Federal Theatre Project) in the production of *The Trial of Dr. Beck*. This play, in 1937, ignited his acting career. Soon thereafter, Sydnor landed a part in the first of the then famous Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds* shows on Broadway. His other Broadway credits include *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, *Cabin in the Sky* with Ethel Waters and Katherine Dunham, *The Skin of our Teeth* with Tallulah Bankhead, *Detective Story*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* with Paul Newman, *I Never Sang For My Father*, and *First Monday in October* with Henry Fonda. He performed in repertory theatres at the Boston Arts Festival, Syracuse Stage, The Goodman Theatre in Chicago, and Lincoln Center. Among his off-Broadway and summer stock performances are the plays, *The Black Terror*, *Take a Giant Step* with Lou Gossett, *The Emperor Jones* with James Earl Jones, and *The Little Foxes*.

Sydnor also appeared in television shows and in films. His television appearances included: *The Defenders*, the Hallmark Playhouse, *The Last of the Belles*, *The Silence*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, and soap operas *As the World Turns*, *Love of Life*, and *Young Doctor Malone*. His movie credits included *Funny Girl*, *Up the Down Staircase*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, *The Hustler*, and *The Suspect*. In addition, Sydnor was the commercial advertising representative for Uncle Ben's Rice in France, Greece, and Guadalupe.

Sydnor was called to serve in the armed forces in 1943, where he was a First Sergeant in Army Squadron D (an all black Unit) in the 1504<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force Base Unit, stationed in Fairfield, California. A trained photographer, Sydnor had developed a specialty in photographing babies, however, while in the service he was assigned to make training pictures for the Army.

In May 1945, Sydnor and his wife, Virginia, were featured in *The American Home*, a popular decorating magazine of the day. *The American Home* until then, had never done a feature spread on blacks. The article, “They Put the Difference in War Bonds,” detailed the artistic and inventive home of a New York couple on a meager budget who purchased war bonds to help the war effort overseas. It made no mention of the Sydnors’ race, however, the article included pictures of the couple in their home. This resulted in a flood of correspondence, both pro and con, from the magazine’s readers.

Sydnor met his second wife, the former Lucille Altman in 1963. After starring in many roles in various venues, Earl Sydnor died in New York City on July 9, 1989.

#### Bibliography

“Actor Earl Sydnor, 81 Dies After Long Illness.” *New York Amsterdam News*. July 22, 1989: 33.

Klotman, Phyllis Rauch. *Frame By Frame – A Black Filmography*. Indiana Univ. Press (Bloomington, IN), 1979.

Peterson, Bernard Jr. *A Century of Musicals in Black and White, An Encyclopedia of Musical Stage Works By, About, or Involving African Americans*. Greenwood Press (Westport, CT), 1993.

Woll, Allen. *Dictionary of the Black Theatre, Broadway, off-Broadway, and Selected Harlem Theatre*. Greenwood Press (Westport, CT), 1983.

### **Scope and Content**

The Earl Sydnor Papers, 1929-1989, consist of two series: **Personal** and **Professional**. The **Personal** series includes biographical materials, general correspondence, and a souvenir booklet from the Air Transport Command, Pacific Division, of the Army Air Force (AAF). The series also contains correspondence regarding his appearance in *The American Home* Magazine in 1945, and a scrapbook (volume 2) documenting the article and the ensuing controversy.

The **Professional** series contains correspondence regarding his acting career. Also in this series are articles, reviews, and programs related to the productions in which he appeared. Sydnor's published and unpublished poetry and short stories are also in this series, along with two scrapbooks - volume 1 documenting his acting career and WWII service, and volume 3 recording his professional endeavors.

### **Provenance**

SCM 83-4 Received from Earl Sydnor, 1983

SCM 90-37 Received from Lucille Sydnor, June 1990

Processed by: Andrea R. Jackson/ Diana Lachatanere

November 2001

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
1		PERSONAL
	1	Biographical Information
	2	The American Home Correspondence, 1945-1946, n.d.
	3	General Correspondence
	4	Souvenir Journal – Program, 1594 <sup>th</sup> AAF Base Unit, Pacific Division, Air Transport Command, 1944
2	1	Scrapbook
		PROFESSIONAL
	2	Correspondence, 1931-1987, n.d.
	3	Programs of Performances
	4	Articles and Reviews, 1930-1988, n.d.
		Writings
		The Sunday Evening Quill, April 1929, June 1930
		The Sign, November 1935
		True Freedom for Negro and White Labor, n.d.
	5	Poetry, Short stories, etc.
		Scrapbook, vol. 1
		Scrapbook, vol. 3

## SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

**Name of Collection/Papers** Earl Sydnor Papers

**Accession Number** SCM83-4, SCM90-37

**Donor:** Earl Sydnor, Lucille Sydnor

**Gift** XX

**Date received:** 1983;May/June,1990

**Date transferred:** 1983; 7/24/90

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 Art and Artifacts Division:**

Calender Movie Advertisement and Product Advertisements

**Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:**

39 Photographs, 1 Box of Photos

**Accessioned by:** Diana Lachatanere **Date:** 1983, 7/23/90