



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

Guide to the

Nella Larsen Letters

1928

Sc MG 407

Home to Harlem Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Summary

Creator: Larsen, Nella

Title: Nella Larsen Letters

Date: 1928

Size: 0.01 linear feet (1 folder)

Source: Purchase, McBlain Books, 12/--/90

Revision History: This finding aid was updated by Allison Hughes.

Abstract: The Nella Larsen Letters consist of two letters written by this author to Edward Wasserman and deal with the most spectacular African American social event of the decade, the 1928 wedding of Countee Cullen and W.E.B. DuBois' daughter, Yolande. The incompatible couple was divorced in 1930.

Preferred citation: [Item], Nella Larsen Letters, Sc MG 407, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Creator History

Nella Larsen was a Harlem Renaissance writer, librarian and nurse. She was born in Chicago in 1893 to a white Danish mother and a black West Indian father. Two years later, after her father died, her mother married a Dane. Educated in Chicago, at sixteen Larsen travelled to Denmark and remained for three years. After a year of study at Fisk University, she attended the University of Copenhagen, and later returned to the United States where she graduated from the Lincoln Hospital Training Program in New York (1915). Larsen married Elmer S. Imes, an African American physicist in 1919, and became associated with the cultural awakening in Harlem, known as the Harlem Renaissance. From 1921-1926 she worked as a children's librarian at the 135 Street Branch of the New York Public Library.

Larsen's first short story was published in 1926, and her two novels quickly followed: *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). The following year she became the first African American woman to win a Guggenheim award for creative writing. Her books are autobiographical in nature, dealing with identity

and marginality and explore the consciousness and psychology of female character. An unsubstantiated charge of plagiarism and her divorce in 1933 ended Larsen's career as one of the Harlem Renaissance's major novelists. Her nursing career began in 1941 and she worked as a nurse in several hospitals in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Larsen died in relative obscurity in 1964.

Scope and Content Note

The Nella Larsen Letters consist of two letters written by this author to Edward Wasserman and deal with the most spectacular African American social event of the decade, the 1928 wedding of Countee Cullen and W.E.B. DuBois' daughter, Yolande. The incompatible couple was divorced in 1930. The letters pertain to a pre-nuptial party Larsen gave at her home, to which Wasserman was invited. Larsen also mentions a review of her book, *Quicksand*.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American authors

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Personal correspondence

Names

Cullen, Countee, 1903-1946

Dubois, Yolande

Larsen, Nella