

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

Guide to the

Hilda Simms papers

1930s-1994 [bulk 1940s-1950s] Sc MG 539

Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2017.

Summary

Creator: Simms, Hilda, 1918-1994

Title: Hilda Simms papers

Date: 1930s-1994 [bulk 1940s-1950s]

Size: 27.86 linear feet (59 boxes, 4 volumes)

Source: Donated by Evelyn B. Sharp, 1995.

Abstract: Hilda Simms (1920-1994) was an actress best known for playing the title role in the American Negro Theater production of Anna Lucasta that moved successfully to Broadway in 1944. Her acting career also included film, television, and radio broadcasts. The Hilda Simms papers date from the 1930s to 1994 (bulk dates 1940s-1950s) and document her career as an actress; her work on creative arts and drug treatment programs in New York; and her personal life.

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Processing note: Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2017. Materials is this collection were previously arranged.

Separated Materials:

Hilda Simms photograph collection [graphic]. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Hilda Simms portrait collection [graphic]. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Creator History

Hilda Simms (1920-1994) was an actress best known for playing the title role in the American Negro Theater production of *Anna Lucasta* that moved successfully to Broadway in 1944. Her acting career also included film, television, and radio broadcasts. Simms was born Hilda Therese Moses to Lydia and Emil Moses in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was one of nine children.

Simms was awarded a scholarship to St. Margaret's Academy, and was the first person of color to graduate from the institution. She took courses at the University of Minnesota, and was a member of a university drama group. Simms received a B.S. from Hampton Institute (now University) in Virginia. She was also awarded a teaching fellowship from Hampton, and taught English and drama while pursing her degree. Additionally, she studied Shakespeare with Harry Wagstaff Gribble; dramaturgy and voice with Dorothy Mower at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago; and speech and movement with Betty Cashman at Carnegie Hall in New York City, among other arts and language lessons.

She married William Simms in 1941. They divorced after a couple of years, but she retained his surname. In 1943, Simms moved to New York City, and worked at the Caribbean desk for the Office of War Information; where she wrote, produced, and acted in radio dramas for troops aboard. She also joined the American Negro Theater, which lead to her title role in *Anna Lucasta*. After receiving strong reviews, the production moved to the Mansfield Theatre (1944). It was the first all-black cast on Broadway acting in a drama unrelated to racial issues.

Simms followed the production when it toured Europe as well. In London, she married American actor Richard Angarola, but they later divorced in 1962. While overseas, Simms also starred in *The Gentle People* (1950) and *Hassan* (1951) in the United Kingdom; and sang in Paris nightclubs under the name Julie Riccardo.

When Simms returned to the United States in the 1950s, she acted in *The Joe Louis Story* (1953) and *The Black Widow* (1954) films; and *The Nurses* (1962-1964) television series. She was also the host of her own New York WOV radio program, *Ladies' Day*.

In the 1960s, Simms was the director of the Creative Arts Program for the New York State Commission for Human Rights, where she focused on discrimination and the lack of roles for non-white actors in film and television. In the 1970s through the early 1990s, Simms was a vocational specialist at the Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation, where she created a "theatre therapy" program, and did other creative initiatives with participants in the clinics.

Her professional affiliations included the Actor's Equity Foundation and the Screen Actors Guild, among other organizations. Simms received honors and awards from the Minneapolis Urban League (1953); New York City YMCA (1954); the Harlem Hospital School of Nursing (1956); and the National Council of Negro Women among others.

Simms died of pancreatic cancer at her sister's home in Buffalo, New York in 1994.

Scope and Content Note

The Hilda Simms papers date from the 1930s to 1994 (bulk dates 1940s-1950s) and document her career as an actress; her work on creative arts and drug treatment programs in New York; and her

personal life. The collection consists of correspondence, scripts, programs, clippings, photographs, sound recordings, moving images, reports, notes, ephemera, and writings. It is not a comprehensive record, but it does highlight many of her endeavors; especially her title role in the *Anna Lucasta* play; her WOV *Ladies' Day* radio show; her work on the New York State Commission for Human Rights and the Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation programs; and her commitment to various organizations. The bulk of the collection is correspondence, both professional and personal, and tracks the development of her career, and details Simms's relationships. Simms's time in Europe during the late 1940s to early 1950s is also represented here through theater files, a diary, notes, expense lists and receipts, and souvenirs.

Researchers should consult the related photograph and portrait collections that were separated from these papers. Sound recordings and moving images are unavailable pending digitization.

Key Terms

Occupations

Actresses, Black African American actresses African American entertainers Women entertainers

Subjects

African American radio stations
African Americans in motion pictures
African Americans in television broadcasting
African Americans in the performing arts
Artists and community
Arts -- Therapeutic use
Blacks in the performing arts
Community arts projects
Live radio programs
Motion pictures and television
Women in the performing arts

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence
Diaries
Moving images
notes
Photographs
Printed ephemera
Programs (documents)
Reports
Scripts
Sound recordings
Souvenirs
Writings (documents)

Names

Angarola, Richard, 1920-2008 Addiction Research Center (U.S.) American Negro Theatre New York (State). (State Commission for Human Rights)

Container List

Series I: Professional 1937-1993 (42 boxes; 3 volumes 17.3 lf)

Series I dates from 1937 to 1993 and details Hilda Simms's career, but it is not a full representation of the many roles she played or the positions she held. The series leads with Theater, Radio, Film, Television, New York State Commission on Human Rights, Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation; and other materials arranged alphabetically by category thereafter.

The Theater files document some of Simms's early work through correspondence, play scripts, sheet music, programs, and sound recordings. The correspondence is primarily about role offers and possible productions. The scripts are from various playwrights. *Anna Lucasta* and many others are clean copies; but there are a few with actor notes such as *Hassan* by James Elroy Flecker, and *Dulcinea* by Gaston Baty. Programs from her plays as a cast member include *The Afro-Philadelphian* (1920); *The Captain's Paradise* (1961); and *The Gentle People* (1950). *Anna Lucasta* programs from productions at the Civic Opera House in Chicago (1945) and the Mansfield Theatre in New York (1944) are also present (all programs mentioned are in box 3, folder 20). The run of *Anna Lucasta* at His Majesty's Theatre in London, England is one of the more featured productions in the collection through letters, opening night well wishes, and reviews. Other materials related to this title role include narratives Simms wrote about her experience, and information regarding publicity.

Radio files primarily relate to the development of her WOV *Ladies' Day* daily morning program, which is documented through numerous scripts, playlists, and sound recordings. The commercials and public service announcements demonstrate the program's influence in the local community; and the post cards with song requests display trends in music during that time period.

Film and Television files contain schedules, call sheets, and a moving image clip for the *Joe Louis Story* (1953); a synopsis for *Black Widow* (1954); and correspondence and scripts for *The Nurses* (1962-1964). This area of the collection is scarce.

Simms's duties as director of the Creative Arts Program for the New York State Commission for Human Rights is reflected through agendas and press releases for public hearings; surveys; and reports related to minority actors. These files also indicate how the program initiatives aimed to improve the working conditions of artists of color.

Simms's long-term position with The Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation is represented though memorandas; a couple of research notes on substance abuse; original poetry by her participants; and copies of scripts possibly used during her workshops. These materials communicate Simms's intersecting work; and track the development of her "theatre therapy" program.

The Agents and Managers files hold correspondence about scripts and payments; receipts; and contracts related to the William Morris Agency, Al Parker Ltd, and a few other agencies.

The Appearances files include request letters from various individuals and organizations. These materials give an account of Simms's involvement in her community. An example is a 1944 letter from Publicity Limited confirming Simms as the guest of honor at the Woman Pays Club event (box 27, folder 10). The club was a group of self-supporting women in the arts. Another instance is when Simms served as the official hostess of the 1956 Exposition of Progress event held in New York City. The event was dedicated to the cultural and economic growth of black people; and is recounted here through posters, press releases, letters, and a schedule.

A few of Simms's awards are present in the collection, including a program for the Citizens Achievement Day Committee of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, where Simms was honored with a public service award; and an award for the special distinction in the field of stage, radio, and television from the National Council of Negro Women.

The clipping scrapbooks feature reviews of productions and profiles of Simms, primarily regarding *Anna Lucasta*.

Other professional correspondence includes requests from service men and fans asking for autographed photos; and organizations seeking appearances or other forms of support.

Lucky Lakes estates, a New York summer community, appears to be a business venture Simms participated in with her husband Richard Angarola based on the visitor registers, newsletter production documents, and promotional radio scripts held in the collection.

Notes and Research Materials consists of loose paper, index cards, and a few notebooks that record some of Simms's ideas on various topics, notes on acting and theater, and some lists of names.

The Office of War Information files contain a studio pass, purchase vouchers, a few letters, and a script written by Simms.

Organization files convey Simms's commitment to various civil and political organizations through membership letters; copies of the by-laws and the constitution from the American Negro Theater; contracts and letters from the Actor's Equity Association; agendas, notes, and meeting minutes from the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists; and a transcript of proceedings from the Conference on Creative Use of Minorities in Theatre (1946).

Pariscope was an American news-room project created by Simms and her husband Richard Angarola to chronicle the news, events, and activities of American artists in Europe. The collection contains a manuscript, agreement, and a few pitch letters about the project.

Simms's writings express many of her views on social, cultural, and political issues through her addresses, speeches, and drafts of a few articles. Examples include an address delivered for the National Andrew Jackson Oratorical Contest at the Washburne Trade School (1946); "The Negro in America Theatre" speech; as well as a narrative draft retelling her experience at Camp Wo Chi Ca, an interracial organization for children to work and play in a democratic atmosphere (box 40, folders 8 and 9). There are also drafts of her "The Living Arts" column from the *Tuesday* publication (1960s).

Theater

b. 1 f. 1-7	1940s-1977
b. 1 f. 8-17	Anna Lucasta 1944-1950
b. 2 f. 1-12	Anna Lucasta 1942-1966
b. 2 f. 13	British Broadcasting Corporation 1948-1950
b. 2 f. 14	Conquering Thursday 1959
b. 2 f. 15	The Cool World 1953-1960
b. 2 f. 16-23	Correspondence 1948-1960
b. 2 f. 24	Dulcinea 1957
b. 3 f. 1-2	The Gentle People 1950
b. 3 f. 3	Hassan 1951
b. 3 f. 4	A Lady Passing Fair 1946-1947
b. 3 f. 5-7	"Letters of Famous Women" 1959-1962
b. 3 f. 8	"Love Letters of World Famous Courtesans" 1962
b. 3 f. 9	The Man with the Golden Arm 1950s
b. 3 f. 10	Mandingo 1961
b. 3 f. 11	Only in America 1959
b. 3 f. 12	Petition 1950s
b. 3 f. 13	Rocket to the Moon 1948
b. 3 f. 14-16	A Street Car Named Desire 1950s
b. 3 f. 17-19	Tambourines to Glory 1960s
b. 3 f. 20-23	Programs 1940-1972 For productions where she was a cast member or simply attended.
b. 4 f. 1-16	Programs Broadway U.S.A"Y" 1943-1984
	Scripts
b. 4 f. 17	1950s
b. 4 f. 18-19	Adler, Henry "Man in the Moon" - Baty, Gatson "Dulcinea" 1950s

Series I: Professional (cont.) Theater (cont.) Scripts (cont.) b. 5 f. 1-12 Blake, William "An Island in the Moon" - Griffe, Maurice "On Ne Preête Qu'aux Riches" 1946-1950s b. 6 f. 1-13 Jerome, Helen "The Divine Fool" - Schwiefert, Fritz "Three Dozen Oysters" 1946-1965 b. 7 f. 1-19 Shaw, Irwin "The Gentle People" - Unidentified Script 1940s-1975 b. 7 f. 20-24 Sheet Music 1946-1952 Radio b. 8 f. 1 1947-1956 b. 8 f. 2 List of Radio and Television Stations 1955 b. 8 f. 3 National Negro Network Contracts 1954-1955 b. 8 f. 4-15 Scripts 1937-1957 b. 8 f. 16 **WLIB** 1950s WOV Ladies' Day b. 8 f. 17-21 1953-1957 b. 9 f. 1-10 1954-1962 b. 9 f. 11 Afro Arts Theatre 1955 b. 10 f. 1 Artists Information 1954-1956 b. 10 f. 2 Boy Scouts of America Greater New York Councils 1955-1956 b. 10 f. 3-21 Commercials and Public Service Announcements 1954-1957 b. 10 f. 22-26 Correspondence 1953-1957 b. 11 f. 1-26 Correspondence 1953-1957 Fan mail thank you letters; radio show song requests, and inter-office memorandum. b. 11 f. 27 Dorothy Dandridge "Carmen Jones" 1954 b. 12 f. 1 Katherine Dunham 1955 b. 12 f. 2 Expense Account 1954 b. 12 f. 3 James L. Hicks 1955 b. 12 f. 4 Mailing List and Addresses 1950s b. 12 f. 5 "Pick Your Prize" Contest 1956 b. 12 f. 6-7 Playlists 1955-1956 b. 12 f. 8-12 Promotion and Publicity 1954-1957 b. 12 f. 13 Salary 1954-1956 b. 12 f. 14-15 Sales Orders 1956-1957 b. 12 f. 16-17 Schedules 1954-1955 Scripts b. 12 f. 18-23 1950s b. 13 f. 1-11 1954 June- 1955 January b. 14 f. 1-11 1955 January - 1955 July b. 15 f. 1-9 1955 July - 1955 December b. 16 f. 1-15 1955 December - 1956 June b. 17 f. 1-13 1956 May - 1956 November b. 18 f. 1-10 1956 November - 1957 March

	Series I: Professional (cont.) Radio (cont.)
h 40 f 44	WOV Ladies' Day (cont.)
b. 18 f. 11	Special Markets, Inc 1955 Interview with Philip M. Jenkins.
b. 18 f. 12	St. Philip's Community Center 1957 Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop.
b. 18 f. 13	Staff Newsletter 1954-1956
b. 18 f. 14	Women United for Civic Action 1956
	Film
b. 18 f. 15	1957
b. 18 f. 16	Second Annual New York Black Film Festival 1973-1976
b. 19 f. 1	Anna Lucasta 1959
b. 19 f. 2	Black Widow 1950s
b. 19 f. 3	Carmen Jones 1952
b. 19 f. 4	Cry the Beloved Country 1950s
b. 19 f. 5-6	The Joe Louis Story 1953
b. 19 f. 7	Rachel 1950s
	Television
b. 19 f. 8-11	1950s-1971
b. 19 f. 12	CBS 1967
	Meeting with the actors and writers committee of ethnic minority group.
b. 19 f. 13	Gospel Show 1959
b. 19 f. 14	The Gospel Train Program 1957
b. 19 f. 15-19	The Nurses 1950s-1963
b. 19 f. 20	A Profile in Courage 1956
b. 19 f. 21	The Ring 1952
b. 19 f. 22	Romeo and Juliet 1950s
	New York State Commission for Human Rights
b. 19 f. 23-25	1957-1968
b. 20 f. 1-8	1959-1969
b. 21 f. 1-11	1963-1969
b. 22 f. 1-3	Actors' Equity Association 1968-1970
b. 22 f. 4-5	Actors Questionnaire 1967
b. 22 f. 6	Actors Survey 1968
b. 22 f. 7	Agent Lists 1967
b. 22 f. 8	American Federation of Television and Radio Artists 1967
b. 22 f. 9	American Foundation on Automation and Employment, Inc 1968
b. 22 f. 10-11	Appearances 1967-1968
b. 22 f. 12	Apprenticeship Programs in Buffalo District 1960s
b. 22 f. 13	Art-Six Music 1970
b. 22 f. 14-21	Correspondence 1967-1968
b. 23 f. 1-10	Correspondence 1967-1968
b. 23 f. 11	Ethnic Actors Lists 1966
b. 23 f. 12	Ethnic Minorities Committee 1967-1968

	Series I: Professional (cont.) New York State Commission for Human Rights (cont.)
b. 23 f. 13-16	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 1967-1968
b. 23 f. 17	Equal Opportunities for All Actors Committee 1967
b. 23 f. 18	Films 1960s
b. 23 f. 19	James Earl Jones 1968-1969
b. 23 f. 20	"The King and I" 1968
b. 23 f. 21	Library Accessions Annotated 1967 A bibliographic list of books possibly housed in Simms's office.
b. 23 f. 22	Richard A. Long 1960s
b. 23 f. 23	Lort Theatres 1967
b. 23 f. 24	Notes 1967
b. 23 f. 25	Brock Peters 1968
b. 23 f. 26	Press Release 1964
b. 23 f. 27	Progress Report 1967
b. 23 f. 28	Project Reach 1968
b. 23 f. 29-31	Public Hearings 1968
b. 23 f. 32-34	Research 1960s
b. 24 f. 1	Research 1967-1968
b. 24 f. 2	Brother John Sellers 1965-1967
b. 24 f. 3-10	Summer Stock 1967-1968
b. 24 f. 11-14	Television 1954-1969
b. 24 f. 15-16	Theatre 1968
b. 24 f. 17-21	Writers 1967-1968
	Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation
b. 25 f. 1-10	1967-1990
b. 26 f. 1-3	1979-1986
b. 26 f. 4	Brownsville Tests 1974-1986
b. 26 f. 5	Fordham University Course 1979
b. 26 f. 6	Notes 1982-1983
b. 26 f. 7	Retirement Letter 1993
b. 26 f. 8-14	"Theatre Therapy" 1974-1987
b. 27 f. 1-3	"Theatre Therapy" 1974-1991
b. 27 f. 4-9	Agents and Managers 1944-1959
b. 27 f. 10-14	Appearances 1944-1957
b. 28 f. 1-3	Appearances 1955-1967
b. 28 f. 4-5	Awards 1944-1963
b. 58 f. 1	Awards 1954-1956
	Clippings Scrapbooks
v. 2	1943-1955
v. 3	1944-1963

1947-1986

Correspondence

v. 4

	Series I: Professional (cont.) Correspondence (cont.)
b. 28 f. 6-19	1943-1977
b. 29 f. 1-21	1947-1993
b. 30 f. 1-11	1960-1987
b. 30 f. 12-26	25th Precinct Community Council - Fan Mail 1943-1980
b. 31 f. 1-14	Fan Mail - Brydon Hall, Harvey & Egerton 1940s-1965
b. 32 f. 1-21	Invitations - Wells, Orson 1944-1975
b. 32 f. 22-26	Exposition of Progress 1956
b. 57 f. 3	Exposition of Progress 1956
	Lucky Lakes
b. 32 f. 27-29	1950s
b. 33 f. 1-6	1956-1957
b. 33 f. 7-8	Brochures 1950s
b. 33 f. 9	Correspondence 1954-1957
b. 33 f. 10	Clippings 1956-1957
b. 33 f. 11-12	"Gossip and News" Newsletter 1956
b. 33 f. 13	Radio Promotion 1956
b. 34 f. 1	Radio Scripts 1956
b. 34 f. 2-3	Visitors and Owners 1954-1956
b. 34 f. 4-11	Notes 1940s-1970
b. 35 f. 1-10	Notes and Research Materials 1940s-1960s
b. 35 f. 11-12	Office of War Information 1943-1945
	Organizations
b. 35 f. 13-14	Actors Equity Association 1955-1972
b. 36 f. 1-19	Actors Equity Association - American Foundation for Negro Affairs 1945- 1975
b. 37 f. 1-29	American Jewish Congress - National Urban League 1943-1976
b. 38 f. 1-7	Negro Actors Guild - Screen Actors Guild 1944-1975
b. 38 f. 8-9	Pariscope 1949
b. 38 f. 10	Photographic Negatives 1950s
b. 58 f. 2	Posters 1950s-1990
b. 38 f. 11-19	Programs 1945-1981 For events where she was a participant or simply attended.
b. 39 f. 1-2	Programs 1950-1985 For events where she was a participant or simply attended.
	Press and Publicity
b. 39 f. 3-10	1944-1963
b. 57 f. 4	1947-1953
b. 40 f. 1-3	1948-1967
b. 40 f. 4-12	Writings 1944-1968

Series II: Personal 1930s-1994 (18 boxes; 1 volume 6.98 lf)

Series II dates from the 1930s to 1994 and concerns Simms's private life. The series is arranged alphabetically by category. The bulk of this series is correspondence, including a few letters pertaining to her divorce from Williams Simms; many affectionate exchanges between Simms and her husband Richard Angarola during their marriage; and greeting cards and telegrams from other family and friends.

Biographical information consists of resume drafts, identification cards, educational degrees and alumni newsletters, a will, and a few obituaries. Financial Records include itemized expense lists, invoices, and receipts; a 1949 European income tax form; and a 1957 United States tax form filed jointly with Angarola. The materials illuminate the finances of a working woman and artist during the mid-twentieth century.

Simms's time in France is documented here through a diary of daily updates, brief observations, and a list of her appointments; a notebook in French; and another notebook of expenses (box 55). Additionally, the collection holds ephemera and souvenirs from Paris.

Personal writings contain original poetry written by Simms and Angarola; such as an untitled poem Simms wrote in 1959 about their separation.

poem Simms wrote in 1959 about their separation.
Address Book 1950s
Address Books 1950s-1980s
Appointment Book 1948
Angarola, Richard 1942-1994 Biographical information, military records, and some writings about his relationship with Simms.
Biographical Information 1940s-1994 Simms-related.
Business Cards 1950s
Calendars 1955-1963
Church 1959-1973
Correspondence
1942-1994
1944-1986
1949-1983
1953-1970s
Barr, Murray - Cards 1948-1950s
Cards 1952-1973
Cards - Family 1937-1994
Family
1951-1959
Angarola, Richard
1940s-1970
Angarola to Simms
1940s-1955
1940s-1955
1940s-1990
1947-1950s
Angarola's Family 1940s
Marriage 1948-1967

	Series II: Personal (cont.) Correspondence (cont.) Family (cont.) Angarola, Richard (cont.)
b. 51 f. 1	Paris 1951-1953
b. 51 f. 2-9	Simms to Angarola 1940s-1950s
b. 52 f. 1-11	Simms to Angarola 1947-1957
b. 52 f. 12-15	Johnson, Harvey C 1948-1958
b. 53 f. 1-12	Johnson, Harvey C Sharpe, Evelyn 1947-1973
b. 54 f. 1	Welch, Evelyn 1943
b. 54 f. 2-12	French Acquaintances - Wallace, Babe 1947-1970
v. 1	Diary 1950-1951 From Simms's time in France.
b. 54 f. 13-20	Financial Records 1940s-1993
b. 57 f. 1	Fordham University 1980 Degree.
b. 55 f. 1-7	Hampton Institute 1940s-1993 Now Hampton University. Alumni-related materials.
b. 55 f. 8	Health 1959-1990 Letters about insurance; and a few medical pamphlets.
b. 55 f. 9	Identification Cards 1943-1972
b. 55 f. 10	Insurance 1953-1955 A couple of letters and policy statements for accidental and residential insurance.
b. 55 f. 11-19	Notes 1940s-1960s
b. 56 f. 1-2	Resumes 1940s-1960s
b. 56 f. 3	Simms, William 1944-1951 Materials related to their marriage.
b. 56 f. 4-11	Souvenirs 1947-1950s
b. 56 f. 12	St. Margaret's Academy 1930s
b. 57 f. 2	St. Margaret's Academy 1937 Diploma.
b. 59 f. 1-3	Stamp Collection 1940s-1950s A small amount of stamps Simms collected.
b. 59 f. 4	Will 1968
b. 59 f. 5-6	Writings 1940s-1950s