



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

Guide to the

**Fats Waller collection**

1932-1943

Sc MG 781

Processed by Miranda Mims, 2011.

## Summary

**Creator:** Waller, Fats, 1904-1943

**Title:** Fats Waller collection

**Date:** 1932-1943

**Size:** 2.3 linear feet (6 boxes, 1 oversize folder)

**Source:** Purchase from Charles Apfelbaum, January 2008.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** Nationally and internationally renowned jazz pianist and composer Thomas "Fats" Wright Waller, "Fats" was regarded as a musical genius. The Fats Waller collection is comprised of materials generated and kept by Philip L. Ponce, Inc., Waller's management company during the last ten years of his life and career.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Fats Waller collection, Sc MG 781, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Miranda Mims, 2011.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

**Related Materials:**

Andy Razaf papers, Sc MG 35, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Sheet music collection, Sc MG 915, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

Nationally and internationally renowned jazz pianist and composer Thomas "Fats" Wright Waller was regarded as a musical genius who was able to break into the mainstream through his performance work, prolific songwriting, recording, and radio broadcasts. He is known best for the music he produced in the 1920s with Andy Razaf, among them "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Ain't Misbehavin'", and his scores for musical revues such as *Keep Shufflin* (1928), *Hot Chocolates* (1929), and *Early to Bed* (1943). Waller also appeared in the films *Hooray for Love* (1935) and *King of Burlesque* (1936).

## Scope and Content Note

The "Fats" Waller collection, 1932-1943, is comprised of materials generated and kept by Philip L. Ponce, Inc., Waller's management company during the last ten years of his life and career. The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence, 1932-1942, and other documentation that provide details of Ponce's business relationship with Waller, such as bookings, tours, contracts, and other financial matters. Of particular interest are the reports by Waller's road trip managers, Ed Kirkeby and Eddie Melsher. Other materials in the collection include scripts, manuscripts, and printed scores, 1932-1941; biographical sketches, promotional materials, flyers and playbills, and financial papers, 1932-1942; engagement reports; and newspaper clippings.

**Arrangement:** Collection is organized into 5 series: I. Biographical; II. Correspondence; III. Performances; IV. Financial; and V. News clippings.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American composers  
African American entertainers  
Authors, Black  
Composers -- United States -- 20th century  
Jazz  
Jazz vocals  
Organ music (Jazz)  
Piano music (Jazz)  
Popular music -- United States -- 20th century  
Radio programs -- United States

### Names

Kirkeby, Ed  
Waller, Fats, 1904-1943  
Philip L. Ponce, Inc.

## Container List

### Biographical ca. 1930s-1940s

This series consists of biographical sketches that include several drafts of "Radio's Harmful Little Armful; 'Fats' Waller and His Columbia Broadcasting Orchestra", prepared by the Columbia Artists Bureau. For Waller's European tour, Philip L. Ponce Inc. strongly promoted Waller's appearances with press releases, publicity blurbs, and radio broadcasts. Of note is a history of the Ponce/Waller relationship, including a chronological sketch of Waller's appearances and grossed earnings.

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical sketches ca. 1930s-1940s
- b. 1 f. 2 History of Philip L. Ponce and Thomas Fats Waller relationship ca. 1938
- b. 1 f. 3 Promotional material 1930s

### Correspondence 1932-1941

This series contains letters primarily to or from Waller's management company, Philip L. Ponce Inc., which includes Ponce and his secretary Janet Holmes; and his road managers, Ed Kirkeby and Eddie Melsher, Waller's road managers. The correspondence documents the engagements, booking details, travel arrangements, and problems that arose involving Waller and his band while on the road, such as appearing in the wrong city or not at all. The letters also discuss Waller's poor financial management skills and his alcoholism, both of which impacted his ability to perform and honor contracts.

- b. 1 f. 4 Waller, Thomas "Fats" 1932-1938
- b. 1 f. 5 Cohan, George M 1941
- b. 1 f. 6 Lington, Otto 1938
- Ponce, Philip L
- b. 1 f. 7 1932-1933
- b. 1 f. 8 1934
- b. 1 f. 9 Columbia Broadcasting System – Artist Bureau Inc 1934-1936
- b. 1 f. 10 1935
- b. 1 f. 11-12 1936
  - b. 2 f. 1 1937
- b. 2 f. 2-3 1938
  - b. 2 f. 4 1939-1941
  - b. 2 f. 5 Razaf, Andy 1938
  - b. 2 f. 6 Kirkeby, Ed 1938-1942
  - b. 2 f. 7 Melsher, Eddie 1936-1938
- b. 3 f. 1 Nutt, Charles H 1936-1938
- b. 3 f. 2 Telegrams 1932-1940
- Legal
- b. 3 f. 3 Domestic Relations Court 1934-1939
- American Federation of Musicians
- b. 3 f. 4 Case 110 1937
- b. 3 f. 5 Case 146 1937
- b. 3 f. 6 Case 1263 1938
- b. 3 f. 7 Case 446/336 1938
- b. 3 f. 8 Case 90 1938
- b. 3 f. 9 Case 91 1938

Correspondence (cont.)

Legal (cont.)

American Federation of Musicians (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 10 Miscellaneous 1934-1938
- b. 3 f. 11 Zit's Publishing Co. Inc. vs. Waller 1934
- b. 3 f. 12 Selmer-Conn Inc. vs. Waller 1935
- b. 3 f. 13 Robey vs. Waller 1936-1937
- b. 3 f. 14 Logan and Hill vs. Waller and Moss 1937
- b. 3 f. 15 Weaver McClean Post no. 175 American Legion vs. Waller, Thompson and Pratt 1937
- b. 3 f. 16 Southern California Company vs. Waller 1938
- b. 3 f. 17 Department of Labor Case no. 515-563-40R 1941

Performances 1934-1938

This series consists primarily of typed scripts for Waller's performances on *The Rhythm Club*, *The Radio Row*, *Radio City Matinee*, and *The Shell Show*. There is also a list of Waller's compositions, noting the title of each piece, the lyricist, and the publisher; a list of pieces (submitted to Ben Selvin, 1938) of Waller's compositions recorded by Victor Records (1937-1938); a few music scores, including "Hopeless Love Affair", "How Ya Baby", and "The Joint is Jumping"; and sheet music for "Honeysuckle Rose", "Only a Broken Heart", and "Fraction Fingering". Additionally, there are programs and playbills, including some from his international appearances and the film *King of Burlesque*.

Radio scripts

- b. 4 f. 1-4 The Rhythm Club 1934
- b. 4 f. 5 Radio City Matinee 1935
- b. 4 f. 6 Radio Row
- b. 4 f. 7 The Shell Show 1937
- b. 4 f. 8 Miscellaneous 1938
- b. 4 f. 9 Composition lists 1937-1938
- b. 4 f. 10 "Not There – Right There" (annotated song lyrics) 1938
- b. 4 f. 11 Musical scores
- b. 4 f. 12 Published songbooks
- b. 4 f. 13 Programs and playbills 1935-1938
- b. 4 f. 14 Flyers
  - o. 1 Posters 1938

Financial 1933-1942

This series holds contracts, signed by Waller (and a few by J.P. Johnson and Andy Razaf) for personal appearances, performances, vaudeville engagements, and royalty and songwriters' agreements. There are also booking statements and receipts describing the nature of the orchestra's engagements (in some instances, the location, venue, and promoter are listed), grossed revenue, commissions paid, and orchestra and individual salaries. The daily venue or orchestra reports give a broader account of tickets sold, broken down by gender and percentages. The daily and weekly reports are more detailed than the venue reports; they include expenses as well as income. A descriptive report of the European tour in 1938 is available as well as accountant statements and an audit. The general financial folder contains some of Waller's bank statements, personal account information, invoices, rail ticket stubs and itineraries, mileage amounts, financial matters concerning the Yacht Club, advances on songs, and tax returns.

- b. 5 f. 1 Contracts 1934-1938
- b. 5 f. 2 Copyright certificates 1936-1938
- b. 5 f. 3 Royalty statements 1936-1942
- b. 5 f. 4 Commissions/salary reports 1934-1936

Financial (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 5 Hourly reports, "All American Chump Program" 1936
- b. 5 f. 6 Daily box office statements 1934-1937
- b. 5 f. 7 Daily venue/orchestra reports 1936
- b. 5 f. 8 Daily venue/fulfilled engagement reports 1937-1939
- b. 5 f. 9 Invoices, Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc 1934-1936
- b. 5 f. 10 Waller Automobile invoices and insurance coverage 1934-1938
- b. 5 f. 11 Daily and weekly financial reports 1933-1941
- b. 5 f. 12 General 1935-1942
- b. 5 f. 13-15 Expenses (bills and receipts) 1935-1941

News clippings 1934-1943

This series is comprised of newspaper clippings from the U.S. and abroad, highlighting Waller's performances. Most of the clippings have been glued onto sheets of paper that have been annotated, noting the name of the newspaper and the date. Many of the clippings are from Boston, New York, and Los Angeles newspapers. Of note are reviews and publicity for Waller's shows and performances including the *Rhythm Club*, *Hooray for Love*, *Connie's Inn Revue*, *King of Burlesque*, and the Famous Door Club, 1935-1937. Additionally, there are clippings from 1935 relating to mob threats; a clipping from Waller's 1938 European tour with Otto Lingo, the Scandinavian bandleader; and reports showing the top best songs selling for the months of June, July, August, and November in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, 1936-1937.

- b. 6 f. 1 1934-1935
- b. 6 f. 2 1936-1937
- b. 6 f. 3 1938
- b. 6 f. 4 European Tour 1938-1939
- b. 6 f. 5 Waller and Ponce undated
- b. 6 f. 6 Waller's service and funeral 1943
- b. 6 f. 7 1935-1938