

# **Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio**

**Guides to Special Collections in the Music Division of the Library of Congress**



**Music Division, Library of Congress  
Washington, D.C.  
2018**

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Processed by the Music Division of the Library of Congress

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Music Division, 2018  
Revised 2018 July

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio

**Span Dates:** 1929-2010

**Bulk Dates:** (bulk 1935-1952)

**Call No.:** ML31.V47

**Extent:** 610 items

**Extent:** 4 containers

**Extent:** 2.25 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/2014572572>

**Summary:** Two scrapbooks document the activities of the Hessler Dance Studio of Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1930s and also the performance career of one of the studio's pupils, Vera-Ellen Rohe. Vera-Ellen (1921-1981), who performed under her first name, acted and danced in Hollywood films in the 1940s and 1950s. Scrapbooks were compiled by Violet and Catherine Ralstin and Catherine's husband, Paul Murphy, friends from growing up together in Ohio. Correspondence in the collection is between them and their families and Vera-Ellen and her mother, Alma Rohe. Additional items such as recital programs, ticket stubs, and handwritten dance routines document the dance activities and training at the Hessler Dance Studio. The career of Vera-Ellen and several other notables trained by the Hessler studio are documented in magazine and newspaper articles.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Kaye, Danny.

Murphy, Catherine Ralstin, 1920-2011--Correspondence.

Murphy, Catherine Ralstin, 1920-2011.

Murphy, Paul, 1919-1985--Correspondence.

Murphy, Paul, 1919-1985.

Porter, Violet Ralstin, 1920-1977--Correspondence.

Porter, Violet Ralstin, 1920-1977.

Rohe, Alma, 1891-1980--Correspondence.

Vera-Ellen, 1921-1981--Correspondence.

Vera-Ellen, 1921-1981.

### Organizations

Hessler Dance Studio (Cincinnati, Ohio)

### Subjects

Dance schools--Ohio--Cincinnati.

Dancers--United States.

Motion picture actors and actresses--United States.

### Titles

*Scrapbooks on Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio, 1929-2010 (bulk 1935-1952)*

*Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio, 1929-2010*

### Form/Genre

Articles.

Clippings (Information artifacts)

Clippings--1930-1960.

Correspondence.

Photographic prints--1930-1960.

Photographic prints.  
Portrait photographs--1930-1960.  
Programs (Documents)  
Programs--Ohio--Cincinnati.  
Promotional materials.  
Scrapbooks--1930-1960.  
Scrapbooks.

## Provenance

Gift; Catherine Ralstin Murphy; 2006-2010

## Custodial History

The collection was acquired by the Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division over a span of years (2006-2010); custody of the collection was transferred to the Music Division in 2018.

## Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

## Processing History

Clark Evans of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division created a list of correspondence, biographical essay, and summary of materials comprising the Scrapbooks on Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio. In 2018, these inventories were adapted by Libby Smigel for the Music Division's finding aid template and coded by her in EAD format.

## Transfers

The two books included with the collection have been cataloged as part of the Performing Arts Reading Room (PARR) Reference Collection: *Jack Manning: A Biography* by Ruth Eleanor Howard, and *Vera-Ellen: The Magic and the Mystery* by David Soren.

One 45 rpm disc recording that Paul Murphy made and sent to Catherine while he was stationed on the West Coast has been transferred to the Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where it is identified as part of the Ralstin/Murphy Collection (MAVIS no. 17589).

## Related Material

The Music Division of the Library of Congress houses special collections and items related to the content of this collection. For example, the [Danny Kaye and Sylvia Fine Collection](#) documents the career of one of Vera-Ellen's major co-stars, Danny Kaye. As Vera-Ellen's roles onstage and in film were typically those in musical theatre, many musical theatre collections in the Music Division document these stage and film productions.

## Copyright Status

Materials from the Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

## Access and Restrictions

Materials found in the Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Music Division before visiting to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Certain restrictions to use or copying of materials may apply.

**Restriction:** Original scrapbook pages are too fragile to be served. Patrons must use the scans or reference copies.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item, date, container number], Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

Cincinnati native **Vera-Ellen** was one of America's leading dance stars of the 1940s and 1950s. She was born Vera Ellen Rohe on February 16, 1921, the only child of Alma Westmeier and Martin Rohe. (The hyphen was not used in her name until the early 1940s.) Shortly after her birth, the family moved to the Cincinnati suburb of Norwood. Fearing their daughter was undersize and lacking in physical activity, her parents enrolled her in dance lessons at the Hessler Dance Studios, beginning around 1930 when she was 9 years old. Rapidly establishing herself as an excellent student, Vera-Ellen's experiences at the Hessler Studios kindled her ambition to become a professional dancer.

In October 1936, she departed Norwood with her mother to study at the Segovia School of Dance in New York City. Established as a protégé of tap master Jack Dayton, Vera-Ellen won first prize on the January 21, 1937, broadcast of the Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour, one of the most popular radio programs in the United States. Not yet 16, Vera-Ellen was immediately signed to tour with one of the Major Bowes "units" then popular in vaudeville. Additional vaudeville training came in 1937 when she toured with the Ted Lewis Orchestra. Lewis was renowned at that time for his top-selling recording of "Me and My Shadow" and the catch phrase "Is Everybody Happy?"

At age 18, Vera-Ellen's first professional engagement as an adult performer occurred in April 1939 when she danced at Billy Rose's Casa Mañana nightclub in New York. Additional club appearances and chorus work in several Broadway musicals followed; some of these casts included dancer Robert Hightower, to whom she was married from 1941-1948. Vera-Ellen achieved a major success on Broadway in November 1943 with *The Connecticut Yankee*, a revival of the Rodgers and Hart musical originally produced in 1927. This engagement led to contract offers from several Hollywood studios. Vera-Ellen signed with independent producer Samuel Goldwyn.

Newly arrived in Hollywood in mid-1944, Vera-Ellen made her film debut in *Wonder Man*, a Danny Kaye musical comedy released by Sam Goldwyn in 1945. She starred in another Kaye vehicle titled *The Kid from Brooklyn* (1946), and was loaned to 20th Century Fox for two musicals, *Three Little Girls in Blue* (1946), which garnered her Arthur Murray's "year's most versatile dancer" award, and *Carnival in Costa Rica* (1947). In late 1946, Goldwyn turned down entreaties from 20th Century Fox to either buy out or share in Vera-Ellen's contract. This along with Goldwyn's declining interest in producing musicals brought Vera-Ellen's film career close to a standstill.

Once free of her contract with Goldwyn, Vera-Ellen considered a return to Broadway when MGM procured her services as Gene Kelly's dance partner in the "Slaughter on 10th Avenue" ballet from *Words and Music* (1948). Her success in this film led to a long-term contract with MGM, the period of her greatest fame. Among the musicals in this period were *On the Town* (1949), *Three Little Words* (1950), *The Belle of New York* (1952), *Call Me Madam* (1953), and *White Christmas* (1954). In addition to Gene Kelly, her dance partners in this period included Fred Astaire and Donald O'Connor.

With the movie musical waning as a genre in the mid-1950s, Vera-Ellen turned to stage and television to close out her career. Her final professional appearance was on the *Dinah Shore Chevy Show* (NBC television) in February 1959. Having earlier married Victor Bennet Rothschild in 1954 (they divorced in 1966), Vera-Ellen retired to her Los Angeles home. Her

daughter died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) at age 3 months in 1963. Vera-Ellen died of cancer on August 30, 1981, at age 60.

Biographical narrative by Clark Evans, adapted for the finding aid by Libby Smigel in 2018.

## Scope and Content Note

The Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio documents the activities of the Hessler Dance Studio of Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1930s and also the career of one of the studio's most famous pupils, Vera-Ellen, who acted and danced in Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 1950s. The scrapbooks were compiled initially by twin sisters Violet and Catherine Ralstin, who took classes and performed in recitals and local events with their friend, Vera-Ellen, and other Hessler Dance Studio students. In adulthood when Violet married George A. ("Curly") Porter, Catherine continued the collecting aided by her husband, Paul Murphy.

In addition to two scrapbooks, the collection includes loose materials, including correspondence between the Ralston twins and Vera-Ellen and her mother, Alma Rohe; programs and related studio notes; informal and studio photographs; and ephemera such as ticket stubs.

The **Scrapbooks** series includes one for the years the children studied dance at the Hessler Studio and one predominantly celebrating Vera-Ellen's career. The scrapbook of the mid-1930s focuses on the Hessler Dance Studio classes and recitals as well as souvenirs and newspaper clippings related to performing arts events in the Cincinnati area. The Hessler studio items include recital records and class schedules, invoices and receipts for classes taken, newspaper features and calendars. The second scrapbook includes print coverage and published photos of Vera-Ellen (local and national), beginning in the 1940s through the 1950s. Sets of reference copies of the pages of both scrapbooks have been created as the fragility of the paper precludes handling by patrons.

A small amount of loose material related to the scrapbooks is divided between the **Hessler Dance Studio Papers** series and **Vera-Ellen Papers** series. Some of these items were at one time attached to scrapbook pages, but were removed or came loose at some point. Of particular interest amongst the Hessler materials are handwritten notes by both Catherine and Violet that describe recital routines for tap dancing, toe (pointe), and other dances, along with adaptations of popular song lyrics that accompanied the recital routines. The Vera-Ellen materials include correspondence between the Ralston family and Vera-Ellen or her mother, informal photographs and studio portraits, clippings and articles not affixed to scrapbook pages, an autograph book of Paul Murphy containing only the single inscription from Vera-Ellen, and such.

The **Miscellany** series include reference materials on the Ralstins and the Rohes. Two books in the collection are now in the reference collection of the Music Division's Performing Arts Reading Room: an illustrated biography of dancer-producer Jack Manning who visited the Hessler studio as guest artist, and a 2003 biography on Vera-Ellen.

## Organization of the Ralstin/Murphy Collection Relating to Vera-Ellen and the Hessler Dance Studio

The Collection is organized in four series:

- [Scrapbooks, 1934-1953](#)
- [Vera-Ellen Papers, 1935-1981](#)
- [Hessler Dance Studio Papers, 1929-2010](#)
- [Miscellany](#)

## Description of Series

### Container

BOX 3-4

### Series

#### Scrapbooks, 1934-1953, undated

Two scrapbooks: one for the years the children studied dance at the Hessler Dance Studio and one predominantly celebrating Vera-Ellen's career. The Hessler scrapbook of the mid-1930s focuses on classes and recitals as well as souvenirs and newspaper clippings related to performing arts events in the Cincinnati area. The Hessler studio items include recital records and class schedules, invoices and receipts for classes taken, newspaper features and calendars. The second scrapbook includes print coverage and published photos of Vera-Ellen (local and national), beginning in the 1940s through the 1950s. Reference copies of both scrapbook contents were created as the fragility of the paper precludes handling by patrons.

Arranged chronologically.

BOX 1-3

#### Vera-Ellen Papers, 1935-1981

Correspondence (letters, holiday cards, and postcards) between the Ralstin family and Vera-Ellen and her mother; photographs (including photographs during Ralstin-Murphy visits to Vera-Ellen in California; magazine and newspaper clippings (including coverage of Vera-Ellen's visit to Norwood, Ohio), among other items that became separated from or were kept separate from the scrapbooks.

Arranged by format: Articles and clippings, correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous autographed items.

BOX 2

#### Hessler Dance Studio Papers, 1929-2010, and undated

Most materials are printed items, such as advertisements of the Hessler Dance Studio or recital programs. One piece of music is marked for accompaniment of an unidentified performance. Some of the programs and clippings reference Vera-Ellen, artists employed by the dance studio, or other studio classmates who became famous. A number of items are handwritten, such as drafts of the program order, receipts for class fees, and such. Important amongst the items are handwritten notes of dance routines. Most items are undated.

Arranged by format, and by date therein.

BOX 2

#### Miscellany

Items not directly related to Vera-Ellen or the Hessler Dance Studio, such as the ancillary materials prepared by Library of Congress archivist Clark Evans and biographical data on the Ralstin and Rohe families compiled from online databases.

Arranged by format.

# Container List

<b>Container</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>BOX 3-4</b>	<b>Scrapbooks, 1934-1953, undated</b> Two scrapbooks: one for the years the children studied dance at the Hessler Dance Studio and one predominantly celebrating Vera-Ellen's career. The Hessler scrapbook of the mid-1930s focuses on classes and recitals as well as souvenirs and newspaper clippings related to performing arts events in the Cincinnati area. The Hessler studio items include recital records and class schedules, invoices and receipts for classes taken, newspaper features and calendars. The second scrapbook includes print coverage and published photos of Vera-Ellen (local and national), beginning in the 1940s through the 1950s. Reference copies of both scrapbook contents were created as the fragility of the paper precludes handling by patrons. Arranged chronologically.
<b>BOX-FOLDER 3/1</b>	Scrapbook, 1934-1936 1 scrapbook of approximately 89 items Assortment of clippings about Hessler Dance Studio, its students, or Cincinnati-area performances, programs, ticket stubs, invitations, handwritten notes about class schedules, and other materials related to the Hessler Studio or the Ralstin twins Please consult the set of Reference photocopies, as this scrapbook is too fragile to be handled Items originally in this scrapbook that arrived unglued or separated are housed in the folders of the Hessler Dance Studio Papers series
<b>BOX-FOLDER 4/1</b>	Scrapbook, 1939-1953, undated 1 scrapbook of approximately 259 items Magazine and newspaper articles, photographs, and notices of Vera-Ellen, many undated or without identifying publication information Please consult the set of Reference photocopies, as this scrapbook is too fragile to be handled Items originally in this scrapbook that arrived unglued or separated are housed in the folders of the Vera-Ellen Papers series
<b>BOX-FOLDER 3/2-3</b>	Reference copies for Hessler and Vera-Ellen scrapbooks 420 photocopies Copies of each page, with items on the page numbered, along with a separate photocopy of each item on the page
<b>BOX 1-3</b>	<b>Vera-Ellen Papers, 1935-1981</b> Correspondence (letters, holiday cards, and postcards) between the Ralstin family and Vera-Ellen and her mother; photographs (including photographs during Ralstin-Murphy visits to Vera-Ellen in California; magazine and newspaper clippings (including coverage of Vera-Ellen's visit to Norwood, Ohio), among other items that became separated from or were kept separate from the scrapbooks. Arranged by format: Articles and clippings, correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous autographed items.
<b>BOX 1, 3</b>	Articles and Clippings, 1938, 1949-1953
<b>BOX-FOLDER 1/1-2</b>	Magazine issues, 1938, 1949 2 issues

## Vera-Ellen Papers, 1935-1981

### Container

### Contents

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- BOX-FOLDER 1/3-15, 3/4-6** Articles, 1949-1953, and undated  
17 articles  
Features on and photos of Vera-Ellen published in *Movies*, *Movies Stars Parade*, *News Weekly*, and *Movie Life* magazines as well as some in unidentified publications.  
Includes one photo published in *Buckeye Action* and articles in Cincinnati publications.
- BOX 1** Correspondence, 1936-1981
- BOX-FOLDER 1/16-20** Letters, 1936, 1945-1952, 1959, 1974, 1981  
36 items
- BOX-FOLDER 1/21-22** Holiday cards, 1945-1960  
27 items  
Most are Christmas cards; some have notes
- BOX-FOLDER 1/23** Postcards, 1936-1937, 1946-1953  
8 cards
- BOX 1** Photographs, 1935, 1944-1948, undated
- BOX-FOLDER 1/24-31** Studio photographs, undated  
7 black-and-white prints; 1 photocopy  
Headshots or mid-shots; some autographed or inscribed to the Ralstins
- BOX-FOLDER 1/32** Professional photographs, undated  
14 black-and-white small-size prints  
Some staged poses; many in small groups
- BOX-FOLDER 1/33** Postcard photographs, 1944, 1948  
2 items  
Commemorative Hollywood postcard photographs, in which Vera-Ellen appears
- BOX-FOLDER 1/34-36** Personal photographs, 1935, 1944, and undated  
5 black-and-white photographs
- BOX 1, 2** Autographed items, 1945, 1952, undated
- BOX-FOLDER 1/37** Autograph book, undated  
1 item
- BOX-FOLDER 2/1** Roy Rogers rodeo program, 1945  
1 item  
Cover autographed by Vera-Ellen
- BOX-FOLDER 2/2** Event program, 1952  
1 photocopy  
Autographed by alumnae of the Hessler Studio
- BOX 2** **Hessler Dance Studio Papers, 1929-2010, and undated**  
Most materials are printed items, such as advertisements of the Hessler Dance Studio or recital programs. One piece of music is marked for accompaniment of an unidentified performance. Some of the programs and clippings reference Vera-Ellen, artists employed by the dance studio, or other studio classmates who became famous. A number of items are handwritten, such as drafts of the program order, receipts for class fees, and such. Important amongst the items are handwritten notes of dance routines. Most items are undated.  
Arranged by format, and by date therein.
- BOX-FOLDER 2/3-8** Programs, 1934-1939  
9 programs; 1 handwritten draft  
Recital programs of Hessler Dance Studio and guests



## Hessler Dance Studio Papers, 1929-2010, and undated

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 2/9-15	Promotional materials, 1929-1937, undated 17 items Class schedules, correspondence, advertising artwork, invitations, business cards and ticket stubs
BOX-FOLDER 2/16-21	Performance notes and records, undated 14 items Recital dance routines (Spanish dance, soft shoe, toe / pointe dance, carbon copy of rhythm tap routine attributed to Jack Manning), adapted lyrics of popular songs, piano piece titled <i>Patriotic Medley</i> marked with cues
BOX-FOLDER 2/22-24	Photographs, 2010, undated 3 items Recital photograph marked with arrows Published photograph of four children performers Former Hessler student Doris Day name inscribed in cement; date on verso likely for a later reprint
BOX-FOLDER 2/25	Clippings, 1936, 2009, undated 5 items Assortment of newspaper clippings on Hessler associates (teacher, students)
BOX 2	<b>Miscellany</b> Items not directly related to Vera-Ellen or the Hessler Dance Studio, such as the ancillary materials prepared by Library of Congress archivist Clark Evans and biographical data on the Ralstin and Rohe families compiled from online databases. Arranged by format.
BOX-FOLDER 2/26	Descriptive inventories and narratives, 2010 3 items Descriptive inventories of loose items in the collection, an essay titled "The Girls of Hesslers," and a narrative biography of Vera-Ellen, prepared by Library of Congress archivist Clark Evans
BOX-FOLDER 2/27	Family data Printouts of census and other data regarding the subjects and collectors of this collection