

# Hall Johnson Papers



**Music Division, Library of Congress  
Washington, D.C.  
2022**

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/perform.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/2014572460>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/eadmus.mu022012>

Prepared by the Music Division of the Library of Congress

Finding aid encoded by Jane Cross, 2022 April

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Hall Johnson Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1913-1980

**Bulk Dates:** 1913-1944

**Call No.:** ML31.J643

**Creator:** Johnson, Hall, 1888-1970

**Extent:** approximately 100 items

**Extent:** 3 containers

**Extent:** 1.5 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

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

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/2014572460>

**Summary:** Hall Johnson was a choral conductor, composer, and arranger of spirituals. Through his arrangements, writings, and performances of the Hall Johnson Choir, he raised the profile of the African American spiritual as a significant art form. The collection contains holograph and manuscript scores for several of his compositions and arrangements, works by other composers, concert programs, scripts, and legal and financial papers related to his estate. Titles in this collection contain demeaning language.

**Online Content:** The [Federal Theatre Project](#) on the Library of Congress Web site contains posters and playbills for *Run, Little Chillun*.

## Acquisition Information

Purchased from a manuscript dealer in 1999.

## Custodial History

Following Johnson's death, the papers became the property of Bessie J. Pruitt, executor of his estate. She later gave the papers to her accountant. Upon the accountant's death, the materials passed to his widow, and then to an unnamed party who consigned them to a manuscript dealer.

## Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

## Processing History

Jane Cross processed the Hall Johnson Papers and coded the finding aid in April 2022.

## Transfers

Sixty-three discs (sound recordings) from the Hall Johnson Papers have been transferred to the Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as the Hall Johnson Collection (MAVIS no. 17651). An inventory of this material is available in the Music Division's collection file.

## Other Repositories

The National Museum of African American History and Culture holds the Hall Johnson Collection formerly curated by Dr. Eugene Thamon Simpson. The University of Georgia holds the Hall Johnson Photographs collection as well as his personal

books and recordings, and the New York Public Library holds a Hall Johnson Portrait Collection as well as a collection of theater stills from *Run, Little Chillun*.

The Hall Johnson Collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture contains correspondence, clippings, music, poetry, and notes. Emory University's Hall Johnson Collection includes clippings, photographs, programs, and scripts. The Hall Johnson Negro Choir Collection at the Museum of Performance and Design in San Francisco contains programs and publicity files.

## Related Material

Seven arrangements by Hall Johnson can be found in the [Jessye Norman Papers](#), while the [Leonard B. Smith Papers](#) contain two arrangements. The [Oscar Hammerstein II Collection](#) contains correspondence with Johnson. Production records for Johnson's folk opera *Run, Little Chillun* can be found in the [Federal Theatre Project Collection](#).

Johnson's *Thirty Negro Spirituals* is cataloged in M1670.J63 T5, and his *Green Pastures Spirituals* are cataloged in M1513.J6 G72. A score for piano for his work "Honor! Honor!" is cataloged in M1671.J and his work "Swing Dat Hammer!" can be found in M2093.J. Programs for *The Green Pastures* are cataloged in PN2093.A44 1877.

## Copyright Status

Materials from the Hall Johnson Papers are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

## Access and Restrictions

The Hall Johnson Papers are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Music Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Certain restrictions on using or copying materials may apply.

## Online Content

The [Federal Theatre Project](#) on the Library of Congress Web site contains posters and playbills for *Run, Little Chillun*.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item, date, container number], Hall Johnson Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

Date	Event
1888 March 12	Born Francis Hall Johnson in Athens, Georgia, to The Reverend William Decker Johnson (1842-1909) and Alice Virginia Sansom Johnson (1857-?)
1890s	Studied piano with his sister Mary Elizabeth and then James Davis
1903	Graduated from the Knox Institute in Athens Studied at Atlanta University
1908	Graduated from Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina, with a bachelors degree Began graduate studies in theory and composition at the University of Pennsylvania and private violin study at the Hahn School of Music in Philadelphia

- 1910 Won the Simon Haessler Prize for the best composition for chorus and orchestra  
Graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a masters degree
- 1912 Married Polly Celeste Copening
- 1914 Moved to New York City  
Studied composition with Percy Goetschuis, head of the theory and composition department at the  
New York Institution of Musical Arts (later known as The Juilliard School)  
Performed with James Reese Europe's Orchestra for Vernon and Irene Castle's dance salon  
Established his own violin, theory, and composition studio
- 1918 Performed with Marion Cook's New York Syncopated Orchestra
- 1920-1927 Founding violist of the Negro String Quartet, later renamed the American String Quartet, which  
appeared on a program with Marian Anderson and performed with Roland Hayes at Carnegie  
Hall
- 1921-1925 Performed in the pit orchestra for *Shuffle Along* by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake
- 1923 Performed in the pit orchestra for *Runnin' Wild*, the show that popularized the Charleston dance
- 1925 Established the Hall Johnson Negro Choir, later known as the Hall Johnson Choir
- 1926 March 16 First public performance of the Hall Johnson Choir, which took place at the International House in  
New York
- 1926, 1927 Received the Holstein Prize for Composition
- 1930 Arranged and composed music for, and directed the Hall Johnson Choir in, the play *The Green  
Pastures* by Marc Connelly, gaining national recognition  
RCA Victor released the first of many recordings of the choir
- 1931 Received the Harmon Award for his arrangements in *The Green Pastures*
- 1933 March 1 Premiere of his successful folk opera *Run, Little Chillun* at the New York City Lyric Theater
- 1934 Received an honorary doctorate in music from the Philadelphia Academy of Music
- 1935 December Death of Polly Celeste Copening Johnson
- 1935-1937 *Run, Little Chillun* produced by the Federal Theater Project in Los Angeles
- 1936 *The Green Pastures* was made into a film  
Travelled to Hollywood with fifty singers to appear in the production
- 1936-1943 Arranged and directed background music for film shorts, cartoons, and more than thirty  
Hollywood films, including *Lost Horizon*, *Banjo on My Knee*, *Hearts Divided*, *Way Down  
South*, *Swanee*, and *Cabin in the Sky*
- 1937-1939 Composed the operetta *Fi-ye-er!*, which was not produced during Johnson's lifetime
- 1938 *Run, Little Chillun* produced by the Works Progress Administration at the Golden Gate  
International Exposition in San Francisco
- 1941 Organized and conducted the Negro Festival Chorus of Los Angeles  
The Hall Johnson Choir performed on the soundtrack of the Disney film *Dumbo*
- 1946 The Hall Johnson Choir sang in the Disney film *Song of the South*  
Returned to New York City  
Founded the Interracial Festival Chorus of New York City
- 1946 March 26 Cantata *Son of Man* performed at Carnegie Hall
- 1947 Introduced the New Artists annual concert series
- 1951 Sponsored by the U.S. State Department to conduct the Hall Johnson Choir in Berlin at the  
International Festival of Fine Arts  
Extended the tour to Hamburg, Nuremberg, and Vienna to acclaim
- 1951-1970 Reestablished his theory and composition studio, coached vocalists, and continued composing and  
arranging for performers such as Jessye Norman, Marian Anderson, and Robert McFerrin
- 1955 Hired by Disney to organize a group of singers for the *Mickey Mouse Club* television series
- 1965 Published his essay "Notes on the Negro Spiritual"
- 1970 April 19 Music publisher Carl Fischer, Inc. sponsored a Musical Tribute to Hall Johnson  
New York City Mayor John Lindsay presented Johnson with the Handel Award
- 1970 April 30 Died in New York City
- 1975 Elected to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame

## Scope and Content Note

The Hall Johnson Papers span from about 1913 to 1980, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1913 to 1944. Holograph and manuscript scores for voice and piano composed or arranged by Johnson primarily comprise the [Music](#) series. There are also vocal scores, scores for piano, lead sheets, and sketches. Composers such as Henry Cowell, Stephen Foster, Lou Harrison, and Robert MacGimsey are included, and there are traditional songs present as well. Most works in this series are undated. The [Miscellany](#) series contains legal and financial documents regarding the estate of Hall Johnson as administered by Bessie J. Pruitt, a flier and programs for the Hall Johnson Choir, two scripts, and notes.

Titles in this collection contain demeaning language.

## Bibliography

- Abromeit, Kathleen A., comp. *An Index to African-American Spirituals for the Solo Voice*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Armstrong, Matthew A. *The Choral Negro Spiritual Arrangements and Compositions of Hall Johnson Performed in The Green Pastures*. DMA diss., University of Nebraska, 2019. ProQuest (13859374).
- Cuney-Hare, Maud. *Negro Musicians and Their Music*. Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1936.
- Haag, John. "Hall Johnson." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Last modified January 12, 2022. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/hall-johnson-1888-1970/>.
- Jones, Randy. "Afrocentric Voices in Classical Music: Hall Johnson." Last modified February 10, 2016. <http://www.afrovoices.com/wp/hall-johnson-biography>.
- Peters, Erskine, ed. *Lyrics of the Afro-American Spiritual: A Documentary Collection*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Roberson, Leroy Alfred. *Hall Johnson: A Biography and an Analytical Study of Selected Songs for Solo Voice and Piano*. DMA diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1992. ProQuest (9227808).
- Simpson, Eugene Thamon. *Hall Johnson: His Life, His Spirit, and His Music*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2008.
- Southern, Eileen. "Johnson, Hall." *Grove Music Online*. New York: Oxford University Press, January 20, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.14406>.
- Toppin, Louise, comp. "African Diaspora Music Project: Hall Johnson." Last accessed April 11, 2022. [https://africandiasporamusicproject.org/hall\\_johnson](https://africandiasporamusicproject.org/hall_johnson)
- University of California, Santa Barbara. "Discography of American Historical Recordings: Hall Johnson." Accessed April 8, 2022. [https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/mastertalent/detail/104261/Johnson\\_Hall](https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/mastertalent/detail/104261/Johnson_Hall).
- Wittmer, Micah. *Performing Negro Folk Culture, Performing America: Hall Johnson's Choral and Dramatic Works (1925-1939)*. PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016. ProQuest (10102891).

## Organization of the Hall Johnson Papers

The collection is arranged in two series:

- [Music, circa 1913-1960 and undated](#)
- [Miscellany, 1936-1980](#)

## 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

Cowell, Henry, 1897-1965.

Foster, Stephen Collins, 1826-1864.

Harrison, Lou, 1917-2003.

Johnson, Hall, 1888-1970--Archives.  
Johnson, Hall, 1888-1970.  
Johnson, Hall, 1888-1970. Works. Selections.  
MacGimsey, Robert, 1898-1979.

**Subjects**

Choruses (Mixed chorus), Unaccompanied.  
Musical sketches.  
Piano music, Arranged.  
Songs with piano.  
Spirituals (Songs)

**Titles**

*Hall Johnson collection, 1925-1970*

**Form/Genre**

Arrangements (Music)  
Art music.  
Autographs (Manuscripts)  
Concert programs.  
Financial records.  
Lead sheets.  
Legal instruments.  
Musical sketches.  
Notes (Documents)  
Scores.  
Screenplays.  
Songs.  
Spirituals (Songs)  
Vocal scores.

## Description of Series

### Container

BOX 1-2

### Series

#### Music, circa 1913-1960 and undated

This series primarily contains holograph and manuscript scores for voice and piano for works composed or arranged by Hall Johnson. There are also vocal scores, scores for piano, lead sheets, and sketches. Works present include traditional songs and several unidentified works, as well as songs by Henry Cowell, Stephen Foster, Lou Harrison, and Robert MacGimsey. Titles in this series contain demeaning language.

Arranged alphabetically by composer and title therein.

BOX 3

#### Miscellany, 1936-1980

This series contains a flier and three concert programs for the Hall Johnson Choir, two scripts, notes, and legal and financial documents regarding the estate of Hall Johnson as administered by Bessie J. Pruitt.

Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

# Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-2	<p><b>Music, circa 1913-1960 and undated</b></p> <p>This series primarily contains holograph and manuscript scores for voice and piano for works composed or arranged by Hall Johnson. There are also vocal scores, scores for piano, lead sheets, and sketches. Works present include traditional songs and several unidentified works, as well as songs by Henry Cowell, Stephen Foster, Lou Harrison, and Robert MacGimsey. Titles in this series contain demeaning language.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by composer and title therein.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/1	<p>Allen, Gilbert</p> <p>Jesus Keeps His Little Children, undated</p> <p>Manuscript score for voice and piano</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Dedicated to Adrienne Moore</p>
BOX-FOLDER 2/1	<p>Cowell, Henry</p> <p>Words by Dora Hagemeyer</p> <p>The Coming of Light, 1938</p> <p>Ozalid of manuscript vocal score for SSAA chorus</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Inscribed by the composer</p>
BOX-FOLDER 2/2	<p>Into These Hollows, 1938</p> <p>Ozalid of manuscript score for three voices</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Inscribed by the composer</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/2	<p>Foster, Stephen</p> <p>My Old Kentucky Home, undated</p> <p>Arranged by Hall Johnson</p> <p>Holograph score for piano</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Sketch for "Dat Suits Me" on reverse</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/3	<p>Hall, M.</p> <p>Ma Chile, undated</p> <p>Manuscript score for voice and piano</p> <p><i>Note:</i> "To Maudina"</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/4	<p>Harrison, Lou</p> <p>Sanctus, undated</p> <p>Ozalid of manuscript score for voice and piano</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Inscribed by the composer</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/5	<p>Johnson, Hall</p> <p>Carolina Cabin, undated</p> <p>Two holograph scores for voice and piano</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/7	<p>Cecelia, undated</p> <p>Sketch</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Title difficult to read, could also be "Cecilia" or "Creslia"</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/8	<p>Crossing the Bar, 1914 January</p> <p>Poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson</p> <p>Holograph score for voice and piano</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/31	<p><i>Fiy-er.</i> Vision Scene and July Sun Chorus (Picnic Scene), undated</p> <p>Sketches; lyrics</p>



## Music, circa 1913-1960 and undated

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 1/9	In the Evening by the Moonlight, undated Two holograph scores for voice and piano without lyrics; holograph score for piano; holograph lead sheet; chorus parts
BOX-FOLDER 1/10	Land O' Dreams, 1913? Three holograph scores for voice and piano; tenor obbligato part <i>Includes:</i> Sketch for "Bold Brigand"
BOX-FOLDER 1/11	Little Voice (Children's Song), 1960 Five photocopies of score for voice and piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/37	Norfolk Suite. Procession, 1920 Holograph score (incomplete)
BOX-FOLDER 1/12	A Soldier Speaks, 1944 September 21 Holograph score for piano; holograph lead sheet
BOX-FOLDER 1/13	Spirit Lullaby (Crooning Song), undated Holograph vocal score for SATB chorus; manuscript vocal parts
BOX-FOLDER 1/14	Spirit Lullaby (Crooning Song), undated Manuscript vocal score for SATB chorus
BOX-FOLDER 1/7	Way Up in Heaven, 1925 November 25 Sketch <i>Note:</i> For Roland Hayes' concert at Carnegie Hall
BOX-FOLDER 1/15	Unidentified, 1916 Lyric by G. Harry Boldece Holograph score for voice and piano (incomplete)
BOX-FOLDER 1/16	Unidentified sketches, undated MacGimsey, Robert
BOX-FOLDER 1/17	I'm Goin' Down to the River, undated Manuscript score for voice and piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/18	Old Nigger, undated Manuscript score for voice and piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/19	Working Working, undated Manuscript score for voice and piano Thomas, Leonard
BOX-FOLDER 1/6	Carry Me Home, undated Text by Clement Wood; arranged by Hall Johnson Holograph vocal score for male chorus; manuscript parts Traditional
BOX-FOLDER 1/20	City Called Heaven, undated Arranged by Hall Johnson Photocopy of manuscript vocal score for SATTBB chorus; holograph score for piano <i>Includes:</i> Sketch for "End of the Road" <i>Laid in:</i> Notes
BOX-FOLDER 1/25	Day Dawns with Freight to Haul, undated Manuscript vocal score
BOX-FOLDER 1/21	Hold On (Keep Yo' Hand on the Plow), undated Arranged by Hall Johnson Manuscript score for piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/22	K. C. Jones, undated Alternate title: Casey Jones Arranged by Hall Johnson

## Music, circa 1913-1960 and undated

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 1/23	Manuscript score for piano Oh Heaven Is One Beautiful Place, undated Arranged by Hall Johnson
BOX-FOLDER 1/24	Manuscript lead sheet Oh Lord, Have Mercy (?), undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/25	Manuscript score for piano Song of Love, undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/26	Manuscript vocal score Water Boy, undated Arranged by Hall Johnson Holograph score for voice and piano without lyrics; holograph orchestra parts; sketch for male voices and orchestra
BOX-FOLDER 1/27	Woke Up This Morning, undated Sketch Unidentified
BOX-FOLDER 1/28	Chili's Lament, undated Manuscript lead sheet <i>Laid in</i> : Lyric sheet
BOX-FOLDER 1/29	Foggy Bottom, undated Manuscript score for piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/30	Froggy, undated Sketch; lyrics
BOX-FOLDER 1/32	Great Day, undated Sketch; lyrics
BOX-FOLDER 1/33	John Henry, undated Manuscript score for voice and piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/34	My Sweet Little Gal, undated Manuscript score for piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/30	Rocky Road, or Brody Brody, undated Sketch
BOX-FOLDER 1/36	Pansy-Eyes, undated Manuscript score for piano
BOX-FOLDER 1/28	Song of War, undated Manuscript lead sheet
BOX 3	<b>Miscellany, 1936-1980</b> This series contains a flier and three concert programs for the Hall Johnson Choir, two scripts, notes, and legal and financial documents regarding the estate of Hall Johnson as administered by Bessie J. Pruitt. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX-FOLDER 3/1	Flier for the Hall Johnson Negro Choir, undated
BOX-FOLDER 3/2	Legal and financial documents, 1936, 1970-1980 Petition and account of Bessie J. Pruitt, administrator of the Hall Johnson Estate; royalty statements; death certificate; museum proposal; grave certificate
BOX-FOLDER 3/3	Notes, undated
BOX-FOLDER 3/4-6	Programs, 1930, 1938, undated
BOX-FOLDER 3/7	Script, "Command Performance U.S.A.", 1942 October 27
BOX-FOLDER 3/8	Script, <i>Son of Man</i> , undated