



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Mary and Florence Nash papers

1893-1974

*T-Mss 1977-003

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2014

Summary

Creator: Nash, Mary, 1885-1976

Title: Mary and Florence Nash papers

Date: 1893-1974

Size: 8.32 linear feet (15 boxes, 16 volumes)

Source: Donated by the Estate of Mary Nash, 1977.

Abstract: Mary Nash (1884-1976) was an American stage and film actress most famous for playing Katharine Hepburn's mother in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940). Her sister Florence Nash (1888-1950) was an American actress, comedienne, and writer. The Mary and Florence Nash papers contain correspondence, photographs, writings, scripts and other production files, scrapbooks, scores, and personal ephemera.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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Processing note: Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2014

Creator History

Mary Nash was born Mary Ryan in Troy, New York on August 15, 1884. Her father died when she was a young child and both she and her sister adopted the last name of their stepfather, theatrical booking agent Phillip F. Nash. She trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and began her career as

a dancer. In 1905 she made her acting debut in J. M. Barrie's *Alice Sit by the Fire*, which starred Ethel Barrymore, with whom Nash also appeared in *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* (1907) and *The Silver Box* (1907). Between 1905 and 1932 Nash appeared in twenty-seven Broadway productions, including *The City* (1909), *The Woman* (1911), *The New York Idea* (1915), *Major Barbara* (1915), *The Man Who Came Back* (1917), *A Lady's Virtue* (1925), and *The Command to Love* (1927). Along with many stage actors and writers, Nash moved to Hollywood in the early 1930s, and worked there steadily from 1934 to 1936. Though never achieving film stardom, Nash played supporting roles in many notable films including *Easy Living* (1937), *Heidi* (1937), *The Little Princess* (1939), *The Rains Came* (1939), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *The Human Comedy* (1943), and *Til the Clouds Roll By* (1946).

In 1924 Nash married actor José Ruben, but the couple divorced shortly thereafter. Mary Nash died in Brentwood, California on December 3, 1976.

Florence Nash was born Florence Ryan in Troy, New York on October 2, 1888. Like her sister, she became an actress in New York theatre. *The Boys in Company "B"* (1907) was her first play, and she went on to appear in Broadway plays like *The Lily* (1909) and *Miss Patsy* (1910). She simultaneously worked in vaudeville as a comedienne, toured with *The Pied Piper*, and appeared in *When Sweet Sixteen* in Chicago. Her big break on Broadway came with *Within the Law* (1912), which she followed up with *Sinners* (1912), *The Mirage* (1920), and *Merton of the Movies* (1922). Nash appeared with her sister in two Broadway plays, *A Lady's Virtue* (1925) and *The Two Orphans* (1926). She went to Hollywood in the 1930s and moved in with her sister. She only appeared in three films, but one was a classic, *The Women* (1939).

Florence Nash was also a writer and published a volume of poems called *June Dusk: And Other Poems*. She died in Hollywood, California on April 3, 1950.

Scope and Content Note

The Mary and Florence Nash papers document the acting careers and personal lives of Mary and Florence Nash and the writing career of Florence Nash. Correspondence consists of personal letters to and from Mary Nash, Florence Nash, and their mother, Ellen Nash. These letters span many decades and provide insights into the friendships, romantic relationships, careers, opinions, and daily activities of Mary and Florence Nash. Some of their notable correspondents include Rachel Crothers, Charles Dillingham, George S. Kauffman, and Rod La Rocque. There are many letters from C. J. Edgar Renner, with whom Florence Nash was romantically involved during 1906 and 1907.

Writings mainly consist of notebooks and loose pages containing complete poems, fragments, and notes of Florence Nash's poems. These may include early drafts for poems published in her 1918 collection, *June Dusk*. Drafts of many prose works by Nash are also held here, including two unpublished novels.

This collection contains late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs and tintypes of Mary and Florence Nash as children, as well as other family members. These unidentified family photographs may depict relatives of their biological father, James H. Ryan; their mother, Ellen Frances McNamara; or their stepfather, Phillip F. Nash. Signed photographs of friends and colleagues of Mary and Florence Nash are also included here. Their stage and film careers are documented with professional headshots, portraits, and publicity photographs from plays and films in which they appeared. Productions represented with photographs include *The Lady*, *Merton of the Movies*, *Remnant*, *Thy Name is Woman*, and *The Two Orphans*.

Production files contain scripts, flyers, and negotiation letters, primarily from Mary Nash's career. There are scripts from *The Command to Love*, *The Man Who Came Back*, and *The Lady of Niger*; and flyers and handbills from *The Man Who Came Back*. There is one scenario, one unidentified excerpt from a play, and a scene from *A Lady's Virtue*. Production, rehearsal, backstage, and publicity shots of plays and films in which Mary and Florence Nash appeared can be found in Photographs and Scrapbooks.

Personal ephemera contains pamphlets from the American Woman's Association, pamphlets pertaining to Christian Science, visiting cards, membership cards, passports, and a 1914 Business Year Book which belonged to the Mary and Florence Nash's stepfather, Philip Nash.

Scores include published sheet music for early twentieth century popular songs, traditional songs, and classical pieces. There are also three notebooks of Mary Nash's, annotated with hand-written scores and instructions for vocal exercises.

Both Mary and Florence Nash maintained scrapbooks documenting their careers and public personas. These scrapbooks primarily consist of clippings, but may include telegrams, letters, photographs, flyers, and programs.

Arrangement: This collection is arranged in the following groups: Correspondence, Writings, Photographs, Production Files, Personal Ephemera, Sheet Music, and Scrapbooks.

Key Terms

Occupations

Actors (performing artists)
Actresses
Poets
Women authors

Subjects

American drama
American poetry
Motion pictures -- United States -- 20th century
Theater -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century
Vaudeville -- United States -- 20th century

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sheet music
Tintypes

Names

Nash, Florence
Nash, Philip

Container List

- Correspondence 1896-1974
 - b. 1 f. 1-6 1896-1914
Contains letters from C. J. Edgar Renner.
 - b. 2 f. 1-7 1916-1929
 - b. 3 f. 1-7 1920s-1949
 - b. 4 f. 1-4 1940s-1960s
 - b. 5 f. 1-2 1970s
- Writings 1897-1959
 - b. 5 f. 3 Composition Book (Mary Nash) 1897
 - b. 5 f. 4 Notebooks 1910s-1940s
 - Poems
 - Poems by Florence Nash
 - b. 5 f. 5-6 1906-1914
 - b. 6 f. 1-2 1910s-1929, undated
 - b. 6 f. 3 Poems written for Mary Nash 1959, undated
 - Prose Writings
 - Unpublished Novels 1910s-1930s
 - b. 6 f. 4 *John, His Wife, and Jane*
 - b. 6 f. 5-6 *Nance Merwin's Breakdown*
 - b. 6 f. 7-9 Various Prose Writings and Notebooks 1922-1930s
 - Photographs 1890s-1950s
 - b. 7 f. 1-4 Candid Photographs 1910s-1950s
 - b. 7 f. 5-6 Family Photographs and Tintypes 1890s-1950s
 - b. 8 f. 1-3 Family Photographs 1890s-1950s
 - Headshots, Portraits, and Publicity Photographs 1910s-1950s
 - b. 8 f. 4-5 Friends and Colleagues 1910s-1950s
 - b. 9 f. 1-3 Florence Nash 1900s-1950s
 - b. 9 f. 4-5 Mary Nash 1910s-1940s
 - b. 10 f. 1-2 Mary and Florence Nash 1910s-1930s
 - b. 11 f. 1-5 Production Shots 1900s-1940s
 - b. 15 f. 3 Photograph Album 1900s-1950s
 - Production Materials 1919-1942
 - b. 12 f. 1 *The Command to Love* 1928
 - b. 12 f. 2 *Gold Rush Maisie* 1940
 - b. 12 f. 3 *A Lady's Virtue* 1925
 - b. 12 f. 4 *The Man Who Came Back* 1920
 - b. 13 *Remnant - Company Photograph* 1919
 - b. 12 f. 5-7 Other Productions 1922-1942
 - Personal Ephemera 1917-1971
 - b. 15 f. 1 Address Book 1920s

Personal Ephemera (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 8 American Woman's Association Pamphlets 1926, undated
- b. 12 f. 9 Certificates and Programs 1923-1940, 1070s
- b. 10 f. 3 Drawings and Paintings 1921, 1922, undated
- b. 12 f. 10 Identification and Calling Cards 1920-1959
- b. 15 f. 2 Philip Nash - Business Year Book 1914
- b. 12 f. 11 Religious Pamphlets 1917-1971
- b. 14 f. 1-6 Sheet Music 1893-1920
- Scrapbooks 1904-1950
- Mary Nash 1911-1950
 - v. 1 1911-1917
Includes *The New York Idea*, *The Woman*, *The Lure*, *Major Barbara*, *Ohio Lady*, and *The Man Who Came Back*.
 - v. 2 1917
 - v. 3 1917-1921
Includes *Thy Name is Woman*, *The Man Who Came Back*, and *The Big Chance*.
 - v. 4 1920-1921
Includes *I.O.U.*, *Thy Name is Woman*, *The Man Who Came Back*, and *The Big Chance*.
 - v. 5 1920-1926
Includes *The Man Who Came Back* and *Hassan*.
 - v. 6 1922-1926
Includes *Captain Applejack*, *The Lady*, and *The Heart Thief*.
 - v. 7 1928-1929
Includes *The Command to Love*, *A Strong Man's House*, and *Diana*.
 - v. 8 1929-1950
- Florence Nash 1904-1928
 - v. 9 1904
Includes *Lost Paradise*, *Lord Chumley*, *The Boys of Company B*, and *Mrs. Hook of Holland*.
 - v. 10 1905
Contains photographs and articles on famous actors of the period.
 - v. 11 1915-1917
Includes *Land of the Free*, *Sinners*, *Remnant*, and *Merton of the Movies*.
 - v. 12 1915-1917
Includes *Land of the Free*, *Within the Law*, *Springtime*, and *Aggie Lynch*.
 - v. 13 1916
Contains favorite poems.
 - v. 14 1918
Contains articles and reviews pertaining to *June Dusk*.
 - v. 15 1923-1932
Includes *Merton of the Movies*, *Meet Lady Clara*, and Nash's activities with the American Woman's Association.
 - v. 16 1927-1928
Contains recipes.