



WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Walter P. Reuther Library

Guide to the Thelma G. James Papers WSP000751

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Walter P. Reuther Library

5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

URL: <https://reuther.wayne.edu>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Walter P. Reuther Library
Creator:	James, Thelma G. (Thelma Gray)
Title:	Thelma G. James Papers
ID:	WSP000751
Date [inclusive]:	1931-1990
Date [bulk]:	1943-1968
Physical Description:	19.5 Linear Feet (1 SB, 37 shoeboxes)
Language of the Material:	Materials are primarily in English with additional materials in Danish, French, German, and Polish.
Abstract:	Thelma G. James joined Wayne State University in 1923, known then as the College of the City of Detroit. As a professor in the English department, she taught courses on folklore and the Bible as literature. James' research concentrated on folklore and folk medicine practices of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. In 1939, James co-founded the Wayne State University Folklore Archive with fellow English professor Emelyn Gardner. Now the oldest and largest record of urban folk traditions in the United States, this extensive archive was the culmination of interviews conducted by James, Gardner, and their students. Throughout her career, James developed a national reputation as a pioneer of folklore studies and had had a significant impact on the Wayne State community. She received the status of Professor Emeritus upon her retirement in 1967. This collection contains the personal papers of Thelma James, records documenting the history and organizational methods of the Wayne State University Folklore Archive, and Folklore Archive card files on diseases and other topics collected from individuals in Michigan and Detroit from a broad range of nationalities and ethnicities. The card files in this collection include Albanian, African American, Native American, Armenian, Canadian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Lithuanian, Maltese, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Scottish, Swedish, Syrian, Turkish, and Ukranian folklore.

Citation Style

"Thelma G. James Papers, Box [#], Folder [#], Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University"

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History

Thelma G. James was born in Michigan in 1899. She earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from the University of Michigan. In 1923, she joined the faculty at the College of the City of Detroit, which later became Wayne State University. Despite her lack of a doctorate, James held many ranks of professorship in the English Department, developing a national reputation as a pioneer of folklore studies. She was conferred with the status of Professor Emeritus before her retirement in 1967.

James' research concentrated on folklore and folk medicine practices of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. from Detroiters and Michiganders. In 1939, James co-founded the Wayne State University Folklore Archive with fellow English professor Emelyn Gardner. Now the oldest and largest record of urban folk traditions in the United States, this extensive archive was the culmination of interviews conducted by James, Gardner, and their students. African American, Armenian, German, Polish, Ukrainian, and Welsh traditions are just some of those represented.

James' professional life extended well beyond the classroom. She was a member, then president, of both the American Folklore Society (AFS) and Michigan Folklore Society, eventually being elected as a fellow of AFS. James was also a prolific public speaker, leading community discussions about folklore, current events, and the Bible as literature. In 1974, James was appointed to the Michigan Council of the Arts by Governor William Milliken. She received the Michigan Heritage Award from the Michigan Folklore Society in 1985.

James died in 1988, preceded in death by her partner of 40 years, Marguerite Hicks (1891-1978). During their time together, the couple traveled the world and built a vast collection of books by and about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women writers. The Marguerite Hicks Collection of Women's Literature is held in the Special Collections of Oakland University's Kresge Library in Rochester, Michigan.

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Scope and Content

The Thelma G. James Papers contains the personal papers of Thelma James, records documenting the history and organizational method of the Wayne State University Folklore Archive, and Folklore Archive card files on diseases and other topics collected from individuals in Michigan and Detroit from a broad range of nationalities and ethnicities. The card files in this collection include Albanian, African American, Native American, Armenian, Canadian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Lithuanian, Maltese, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Scottish, Swedish, Syrian, Turkish, and Ukrainian folklore.

Series Description:

Series I, Thelma James Papers, 1931-1990, bulk 1943-1968, undated, Box 1: Personal papers of Thelma James and Wayne State University Folklore Archive records. Includes typescripts of articles on folklore by James and others, transcribed folk tales, correspondence, lists of folklore informants, publications on the distribution of nationalities in Detroit, biographical material, James' promotion file, and photographs.

Series II, Folklore Archive Card Files, undated, Boxes 2-38: Folklore Archive disease master file as well as card files containing folklore, proverbial speech, recipes, folk songs, children's rhymes and games, gnomic lore, and diseases and other folklore unincorporated in the preceding boxes.

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Arrangement

Arranged in 2 series – Series 1 (Box 1), Series 2 (Box 2-38). Folders are arranged predominantly in original order (loosely by format). Boxes 1 is inventoried at the folder level; boxes 2-38 at the box level. Card files are arranged alphabetically by subject. For more information on the organization of the Folklore Archive, see Box 1, Folder 27 of this collection.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Acquisition

The Thelma G. James Papers were donated to the Walter P. Reuther Library in 1999 by by Janet Langlois, Director of the Folklore Archives at Wayne State University.

Processing History

Partially processed and finding aid written by Karen Turk on March 4, 2020. Processing completed and finding aid revised by Taylor Henning on August 9, 2022.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Use

Refer to the Walter P. Reuther Library "Rules for Use of Archival Materials." Restrictions: Researchers may encounter records of a sensitive nature – personnel files, case records and those involving investigations, legal and other private matters. Privacy laws and restrictions imposed by the Library prohibit the use of names and other personal information which might identify an individual, except with written permission from the Director and/or the donor.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Wayne State University Office of the President: Clarence B. Hilberry Records, Series I: Administration, 1937, Subseries D: Personnel, 1938-1964, James, Thelma G. (English), 1941; Folklore Archive: Greek-American Family Life Oral Histories; Folklore Archive: Southern Upland Folklife in the Midwest Oral Histories; Folklore Archive: Student Field Projects Oral Histories; Folklore Archive: Student Field Projects Photographs; Folklore Archive: Student Field Projects Records; Folklore Archive: Studies and Research Projects Records

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Controlled Access Headings

- Folklore
- Ethnic groups -- United States
- Manners and customs
- Traditional medicine
- Folk songs
- Wayne State University. Folklore Archive

Collection Inventory

Series I: Thelma James Papers, 1931-1990, (1943-1968), undated		
"Detroit, the Melting Pot" Typescript, undated	Box 1	Folder 1
Folktales from "Detroit, the Melting Pot", undated	Box 1	Folder 2
"Introduction to Folklore Material" Typescripts, undated	Box 1	Folder 3
"Black Man Flying" Typescript by Richard Hungerford, undated	Box 1	Folder 4
"The Folk-Lore Publications in 19th Century England", 1941	Box 1	Folder 5
Zuni Folklore; "The Middle Ant-Hill of the World", undated	Box 1	Folder 6
"Some Notes on a Celtic Tale Concerning Uninvited Fairy Spinners or 'The Horned Women'" Notes, Charts, and Citations, undated	Box 1	Folder 7
"The Uninvited Spinners: A Comparative Study", 1931	Box 1	Folder 8
"Some Specimens of Michigan Folklore" by Members of the Michigan Folklore Society, undated	Box 1	Folder 9
"Some Specimens of Michigan Folklore" Typescript by Members of the Michigan Folklore Society, undated	Box 1	Folder 10
"Polish Folklore in Michigan", undated	Box 1	Folder 11
Folk Songs; French Lyrics and Sheet Music and African American Spirituals, undated	Box 1	Folder 12
European and African American Folklore in Detroit, undated	Box 1	Folder 13
German Folk Songs, Collected Games and Recipes, Detroit's 250th Birthday Programming, and American Folklore Society Meeting, 1947-1962	Box 1	Folder 14
Correspondence and Welsh Folktales from May Granata, 1962	Box 1	Folder 15

Correspondence with Deutsches Volksliedarchiv Regarding Cataloging Methods and Plates Depicting Danish Folk Costumes, 1958-1959 <u>Language of the Material:</u> English, German.	Box 1	Folder 16
Writings of Ralph Dickey, before 1972	Box 1	Folder 17
List of Informants, Transcribed Folktales, and Slang Guides, 1943-1947, 1967	Box 1	Folder 18
"A Bibliography of the Folklore of Michigan" Draft, circa 1950	Box 1	Folder 19
City of Detroit Mayor's Interracial Committee Brochure and "Maps of 1940 Population: Racial and Nationality Group Distribution", 1949-1950	Box 1	Folder 20
"A Study of the Foreign-Born Population of Detroit, 1870-1950" by Albert Mayer, 1951	Box 1	Folder 21
Biographical Material, Curriculum Vitae, Will, News Clippings, Tributes, and Correspondence Regarding Teaching and Retirement, 1934-1990	Box 1	Folder 22
Newspaper Clippings, Approval Requests for Speaking Engagements, and Correspondence, 1941-1981	Box 1	Folder 23
Newspaper Clippings, Approval Requests for Speaking Engagements, and Correspondence, 1941-1962	Box 1	Folder 24
Promotion File; News Clippings, Publications, and Correspondence, 1940-1990	Box 1	Folder 25
James' Memorial; Program, Prayer Card, and Guest Book, 1988	Box 1	Folder 26
Folk Medicine Archive; Partial Inventory L-Z, Instructions for Sorting, and Organization Memorandum, circa 1966	Box 1	Folder 27
Photographs; American Folklore Society, Folklore Archive Department, and Thelma James with Unidentified Individuals, 1949, 1962, after 1965, after 1971, unknown	Box 1	Folder 28
"It's a Fact: A Drug Topics Feature" by R. L. Swain, Jr., 1967	Box 1	Folder 29
Series II: Folklore Archive Card Files, undated		
Disease Master File; Accidents-Bachaches	Box 2	
Disease Master File; Backaches-Bleeding	Box 3	
Disease Master File; Bleeding-Boils	Box 4	
Disease Master File; Boils-Cold Sores	Box 5	
Disease Master File; Cold sores-Colds	Box 6	
Disease Master File; Colds	Box 7	
Disease Master File; Colds-Complexion	Box 8	
Disease Master File; Complexion-Coughs	Box 9	

Disease Master File; Coughs-Cuts	Box 10
Disease Master File; Cuts-Dysentery	Box 11
Disease Master File; Dysentery-Eye Infections	Box 12
Disease Master File; Eye Inflammation-Fevers	Box 13
Disease Master File; Fevers-Headaches	Box 14
Disease Master File; Headaches-Hiccups	Box 15
Disease Master File; Hiccups-Infections	Box 16
Disease Master File; Infections-Labor	Box 17
Disease Master File; Labor-Mumps	Box 18
Disease Master File; Mumps-Pneumonia	Box 19
Disease Master File; Pneumonia-Pyorrhea	Box 20
Disease Master File; Quinsy-Ringworm	Box 21
Disease Master File; Ringworm-Sore Throat	Box 22
Disease Master File; Sore Throat-Stomach Ache	Box 23
Disease Master File; Stomach Ache-Teething	Box 24
Disease Master File; Teething-Toothaches	Box 25
Disease Master File; Toothaches-Warts	Box 26
Disease Master File; Warts	Box 27
Disease Master File; Warts-Wounds	Box 28
Disease Master File; Wounds-Zolutucha	Box 29
Diseases and Folklore Unincorporated into Master File	Box 29
Lore from Various Nationalities; Austrian-Irish	Box 29
General	
Includes customs, sayings and proverbs, rhymes, games, riddles, charms, superstitions, and cures.	
Lore from Various Nationalities; Italian-Southern American	Box 30
General	
Includes customs, proverbs, superstitions, diseases, cures, folk craft, charms, games, taboos, beliefs, recipes, and folk speech.	
Recipes and Folk Speech	Box 30
Folk Speech, Food Superstitions, Tricks, Street Cries, and Finger Play	Box 31

Location File 16: Proverbial Speech and Proverbs, A-K	Box 31
Location File 16: Proverbial Speech and Proverbs, L-Z	Box 32
Customs, Weather Lore, Farm and Planting Lore, Anecdotes, and Cooking Hints	Box 32
Cooking Hints, Folk Songs, Folk Tales, Fortune Telling, Household Hints, Paul Bunyan Stories, Sailor Lore, Holidays, and Charms	Box 33
Children's Rhymes	Box 33
Children's Rhymes	Box 34
Children's Games and Prayers	Box 34
Children's Games and Prayers	Box 35
Gnomic Lore	Box 35
Gnomic Lore	Box 36
Unincorporated Folklore and Diseases; Wishes, Incantations, Union Songs, Author List, and Ethnic Origins	Box 36

General

Includes author list containing authors/contributors to folklore card file arranged alphabetically by last name. Also contains ethnic origin file containing cards arranged alphabetically by nationality listing contributors, folk forms, and languages of folklore.

Unincorporated Folklore and Diseases	Box 37
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General

Includes many diseases as well as card files on beliefs in the supernatural, customs and rituals, ceremonies, dances and games, folk speech and folk sayings, folk wisdom, folktales and anecdotes, and songs, ballads, and rhymes.

Unincorporated Diseases, Place Names (Bibliography), Pourquoi Stories, Slang Expressions, List of Authors, and Rhymes	Box 38
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