



# Guide to the William Grant Still Papers, 1877-1992

---

This collection guide was produced in .

This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

[askRL@duke.edu](mailto:askRL@duke.edu)

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

---

## Table of Contents

---

<a href="#">Summary</a>	3
<a href="#">Background</a>	3
<a href="#">Arrangement</a>	6
<a href="#">Administrative Information</a>	7
<a href="#">Related Materials</a>	8
<a href="#">Names and Subjects</a>	8
<a href="#">Collection Inventory</a>	9
<a href="#">Correspondence</a>	9
<a href="#">Diaries</a>	9
<a href="#">Scrapbooks</a>	9
<a href="#">Printed Material</a>	10
<a href="#">Clippings</a>	11
<a href="#">Miscellaneous Series</a>	11
<a href="#">Writings</a>	11
<a href="#">Pictures</a>	12
<a href="#">Music</a>	12
<a href="#">Ballets</a>	13
<a href="#">Cantatas</a>	13
<a href="#">Chamber Music</a>	13
<a href="#">Operas</a>	14
<a href="#">Orchestras</a>	15
<a href="#">Piano</a>	15
<a href="#">Songs</a>	15
<a href="#">Spiritual arrangements</a>	16
<a href="#">Symphonies</a>	16
<a href="#">Miscellaneous</a>	16
<a href="#">Recordings</a>	17
<a href="#">Audio Tapes</a>	17
<a href="#">Compact Discs</a>	18
<a href="#">Phonograph Records</a>	18

## Summary

---

**Collection Title:**

William Grant Still papers, 1877-1992

**Creator:**

Still, William Grant, 1895-1978

**Abstract:**

William Grant Still (1895-1978) was a Black composer and musician in the United States. Verna Arvey (1910-1987) was a white Jewish musician and writer, and was married to William Grant Still from 1939 until his death in 1978. The William Grant Still Papers contain chiefly photocopies of music, writings, correspondence, diaries, pictures, printed material, clippings, and recordings, which primarily document his work as a composer.

**Extent:**

12 Linear Feet

**Language:**

English.

**Collection ID:**

RL.01255

**Collection ID [Archivists Toolkit Database::RESOURCE]:**

1734

**Permalink:**

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1tt00>

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], William Grant Still papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Background

---

**Scope and Content**

The William Grant Still Papers, 1877-1992, contain chiefly photocopies of music, writings, correspondence, diaries, pictures, printed material, clippings,

and recordings, which primarily document his work as a composer. The collection relates to the historical and critical study of his music, as well as being a valuable source of arrangements for performances. Still's music gained recognition due to his ability to compose classical music which both reflected distinctive African American as well as African influences. In addition, materials (primarily writings and librettos), created by Verna Arvey, Still's second wife, also form an integral part of the collection.

A substantial portion of the collection is comprised of music in manuscript and printed formats as well as in recorded formats, and is contained in the Music series and Recordings series. The collection does not contain all the music Still composed, however it does contain a substantial number of his works and can adequately support the research of Still's compositions. The various genres or mediums in which Still worked, including symphonies, operas, spirituals, songs, and chamber music are represented in the collection. Conductors' scores and published arrangements are included. Among the various publishers represented are Charles Pace and W.C. Handy Company and the J. Fischer and Brothers. Originals from these companies are present. Countee Cullen, Verna Arvey, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Katherine Garrison Chapin are represented among those who wrote librettos or texts for Still's arrangements. Recordings for some of Still's works are available in compact disc, LP, and audio cassette formats. Included in the recordings are performances by Louis Kaufman, Peter Christ, Videmus, the William Grant Still Music Performing Arts Society, the Denver Symphony and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, and other individual artists and orchestras.

Insofar as documenting Still's professional life, the diaries, writings, and correspondence are less complete than the music. Since gaps are evident within the diaries and correspondence, these materials do not provide a full and detailed understanding of Still's career development. However, some information pertaining to his work as well as his personal life is available. The Writings series contains several articles by Still as well as biographical and critical works about Still and his music. This series also contains writings by Verna Arvey and Judith Anne Still. An autographed copy of Arvey's *In One Lifetime* is included. The Correspondence series includes letters between Still and Alain Locke as well as Still and Charles Burch. Within these exchanges, there is some discussion and criticism of Still's compositions, reflections on the problems confronting African American musicians in the 1930s, and a discussion of the possibility of Still teaching at Howard University. Correspondence between Arvey and Carl Van Vechten is also included. The diaries of both Still and Verna Arvey primarily record daily activities. However, Still's diary entries from 1930 contain reflections on his faith and spirituality, his music, and his first marriage to Grace Bundy. Within the Printed Materials and Clippings series are programs and newspaper articles, many of which are originals, that document the performances and the wide acceptance of Still's music.

The Scrapbooks series primarily contain Verna Arvey's collection of clippings which document political and social events between the 1940s and the early 1970s. These clippings demonstrate Verna Arvey's strong interest in the anti-Communist movements of the mid-twentieth century, primarily Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations. The contents of these scrapbooks do not directly relate to William Grant Still's music. To a lesser extent the scrapbooks contain clippings pertaining to race and the status of African Americans in the United States.

### Biographical/Historical

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
1895, May 11	Born in Woodville, Miss.
1895	Moved to Little Rock, Ark. with mother, Carrie Fambro Still
1911	Matriculated at Wilberforce College
1915	Married Grace Bundy
1916	Played in W. C. Handy's band. Employed in music publishing company of W. C. Handy and Charles Pace (Memphis, Tenn.)
1917	Entered Oberlin Conservatory
1924	Composed Darker America
1929	Composed Breath of a Rose
1931	Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra performed Afro-American Symphony
1935	Composed Kaintuck
1934, 1935 and 1938	Won Guggenheim Fellowships

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
1938	Commissioned to compose music for the 1939 New York World's Fair Married Verna Arvey
1940	Arranged Katherine Garrison Chapin's poem, And They Lynched Him on a Tree
1941	Composed Bayou Legend Completed Troubled Island (Libretto by Langston Hughes and Verna Arvey)
1952	First full recording of Afro-American Symphony
1978, Dec. 3	Died in Los Angeles

William Grant Still (1895-1978) was a Black composer and musician in the United States. Verna Arvey (1910-1987) was a white Jewish musician and writer and was married to William Grant Still from 1939 until his death in 1978.

Orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony, have performed Still's works throughout the United States. He received honorary degrees from the University of Arkansas, Wilberforce College, and Bates College.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Arrangement

---

Arranged into the following series: Correspondence, Diaries, Scrapbooks, Printed Material, Clippings, Miscellaneous, Writings, Pictures, Music, and Recordings.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## **Administrative Information**

---

### **Publication Statement**

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

[askRL@duke.edu](mailto:askRL@duke.edu)

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

### **Access Restrictions**

Access restricted. The Music Series is closed by donor request until 2048. Materials from the Recordings Series may only be accessed in the reading room.

Access note. Collection contains fragile audiovisual formats that may need to be reformatted before use. Contact Research Services for access.

### **Use Restrictions**

The copyright interests in the William Grant Still papers have not been transferred to Duke University. Recordings may only be accessed for personal use. For further information, see the section on copyright in the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

### **Acquisition Information**

The William Grant Still Papers (1877-1992) were purchased by Duke University in 1992.

### **Processing Information**

Processed by: Daniel Daily. Assisted by: Boyd Gibson, Sandra Hack Polaski, Stephen Zank, Rachel Sullivan, and Sallie Locke. Completed October 1, 1993.

Encoded by Stephen D. Miller.

Collection guide updated to consolidate Oversize Series into Music Series, update restriction information, and add Abstract note by Tracy M. Jackson, February 2025.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Related Materials

---

### Related Material

[William Grant Still and Verna Arvey Papers](#) , Special Collections Department  
Repository, University of Arkansas Libraries.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Names and Subjects

---

- Scores
- Opera
- Songs
- Diaries
- Music -- Manuscripts -- United States
- African American composers
- Orchestral music -- 20th century
- Opera -- 20th century
- Chamber music -- 20th century
- Spirituals (Songs)
- Music -- 20th century
- Librettos
- Symphonies -- 20th century
- Arvey, Verna, 1910-
- Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967
- Chapin, Katherine Garrison, 1890-1977
- Bontemps, Arna Wendell, 1902-1933
- Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964
- Kaufman, Louis, 1905-
- Still, William Grant, 1895-1978
- Locke, Alain, 1885-1954

---

## Collection Inventory

---

### Correspondence, 1924-1982, undated

#### Scope and Contents note

Includes photocopies of personal letters between Still and Alain Locke as well as letters between Still and Charles Burch. Correspondence between Verna Arvey and Carl Van Vechten is also included. Van Vechten was interested in photographing Still as well as acquiring Still manuscripts for the James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University.

Arranged chronologically.

1924, June-1982, July, undated

Box 1

**Physical Description:** 3 folders

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### Diaries, 1928-1979

#### Scope and Contents note

Contains photocopies of the diaries and daybooks of Still and Verna Arvey. Still's diary entries, especially from 1930, disclose information about his relationship with his first wife Grace Bundy and family financial struggles. The diaries also provide some insights into the progression of his compositions. Arvey's five-year diaries or daybooks record her daily activities. Arvey's earlier daybooks are more complete than the copies from the 1970s.

Arranged in chronological order.

Still, Verna Arvey, 1928-1979

Box 1

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

Still, William Grant, 1930, 1939

Box 1

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### Scrapbooks, 1877-1973, undated (bulk 1953-1973)

### Scope and Contents note

Photocopies of Verna Arvey's "Racial-political-historical" scrapbook. The scrapbook primarily consists of articles from the Los Angeles Herald And Express and chronicles various major political events, especially the McCarthy investigations.

Arranged chronologically.

1877-1954, Mar. Box 2

**Physical Description:** 8 folders

---

1957, May 11-1968, July 21 Box 3

**Physical Description:** 8 folders

---

1968, Oct 15-1973, Jan. 23, undated Box 4

**Physical Description:** 7 folders

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### Printed Material, 1930-1992, undated

#### Scope and Contents note

Includes programs and advertisements for various performances of William Grant Still's music. Primarily original materials with some photocopies.

Arranged in chronological order by year.

1930-1949, 1940s Box 4

---

1954-1986 Box 5

**Physical Description:** 8 folders

---

1987-1992, undated Box 6

**Physical Description:** 4 folders

### 1991, undated

Box 11

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Clippings, 1926-1989, undated

### Scope and Contents note

Includes photocopies and originals of newspaper reviews of Still's music and performances of his works.

1926-1992, undated

Box 6

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Miscellaneous Series, 1936-1989, undated

### Scope and Contents note

Includes copies of Still and Avery's wills and other legal documents, a statement of royalties, a puzzle, and proclamations recognizing Still. Chiefly photocopies.

Arranged chronologically by year.

1936-1991, undated

Box 6

undated

Box 7

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Writings, 1929-1992, undated

### Scope and Contents note

Primarily articles by Still and Verna Arvey, as well as books by Arvey and Judith Anne Still. Also included is an article by Langston Hughes pertaining to the libretto he wrote for *Troubled Island*, and articles by Alain Locke. Includes original publications and photocopies, no manuscript drafts are present.

Primarily, articles and shorter works are arranged in chronological order by year and precede the books which are also arranged chronologically.

1929-1985

Box 7

**Physical Description:** 6 folders

**1950**

Box 11

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

1986-1992, undated	Box 8
<b>Physical Description:</b> 3 folders	
Choreographic Music, 1941	Box 8
<b>Physical Description:</b> 2 folders	
In One Lifetime, 1984	Box 8
William Grant Still: A Voice High-Sounding, 1990	Box 9
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **Pictures, 1911-1949, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Contains black and white images of Still and his family. Some of the images capture moments in Still's professional career.

Arranged in chronological order by year.

1911-1949, undated	Box 9
<b>Physical Description:</b> 2 folders	

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **Music, 1921-1991, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Includes copies of music composed by William Grant Still, in a variety of music genres including cantatas, chamber music, operas, orchestral music, and others.

A complete list of the works within each genre has been prepared by a graduate student from the Duke University Department of Music and is in an information folder. The arrangement of the works in this collection is based upon that document, but does not follow it exactly.

This series is comprised primarily of photocopies.

Comprised of the following subseries: Ballets, Cantatas, Chamber Music, Operas, Orchestras, Piano, Spiritual Arrangements, Songs, and Miscellaneous.

The subseries are arranged alphabetically and within each subseries the compositions are alphabetically by title. A complete list of the works within each genre has been prepared by a graduate student from the Duke University Department of Music and is in an information folder. The arrangement of the works in this collection is based upon that document, but does not follow it exactly.

**Access Restrictions:**

Access restricted. Series closed by donor request until 2048.

**Ballets, 1941, undated**

**Scope and Contents note**

Includes the composer's notes for *La Guiablesse* and the arrangement and play for *The Sorcerer*.

D-S, 1941, undated Box 10

B-T, 1933-1938, undated Box 12

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

**Cantatas, 1931**

**Scope and Contents note**

Contains a J. Fischer and Bro. original of *And They Lynched Him on A Tree*.

A1931 Box 10

A1931 Box 13

**Chamber Music, 1936-1966, undated**

**Scope and Contents note**

Arrangements of Still's compositions by Anthony Griggs and Thomas Smith are included.

A-W, 1936-1991, undated Box 10

**Physical Description:** 3 folders

B-V, 1936-1966, undated Box 13

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

## Operas, 1936-1963, 1976, undated

### Scope and Contents note

Included is a signed and inscribed copy of Bayou Legend and a conductor's score for The Pillar. Librettists for the various works include Bruce Forsythe, Langston Hughes, Frank Sherwood, and Verna Arvey.

A Bayou Legend, (Libretto only) , undated	Box 10
A Bayou Legend, undated	Box 14
<b>Physical Description:</b> 7 folders	
Blue Steel, undated	Box 14
<b>Physical Description:</b> 3 folders	
Blue Steel, undated	Box 15
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	
Costaso, 1950	Box 15
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	
Costaso, 1950	Box 16
<b>Physical Description:</b> 3 folders	
From the Furnace of the Sun, 1936	Box 16
Highway 1, U.S.A., 1963, undated	Box 16
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	
Minette Fontaine, undated	Box 17
<b>Physical Description:</b> 6 folders	
Mota, undated	Box 17
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	
Mota, undated	Box 18
<b>Physical Description:</b> 3 folders	
The Pillar, 1955, undated	Box 18
<b>Physical Description:</b> 6 folders	
Troubled Island, (Libretto by Langston Hughes) , 1976	Box 10
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 folders	

Troubled Island, (Libretto only) , undated	Box 10
--------------------------------------------	--------

Troubled Island, undated	Box 19
--------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 7 folders

Troubled Island, undated	Box 20
--------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

### **Orchestras, 1935-1991, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Includes an original publication of Wood Notes and works by other composers which were orchestrated by Still.

A-Am, 1935-1949, undated	Box 20
--------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 4 folders

Ar-O, 1922-1959, undated	Box 21
--------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 7 folders

C-S, 1937-1991, undated	Box 11
-------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

Pa-Y, 1921-1959, undated	Box 22
--------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 5 folders

### **Piano, 1916-1972**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Contains pieces primarily written for piano instrumentation.

Aundated	Box 22
----------	--------

A-F, 1923-1928, undated	Box 22
-------------------------	--------

F-S, 1916-1972	Box 11
----------------	--------

L-W, 1937-1943, undated	Box 23
-------------------------	--------

**Physical Description:** 6 folders

### **Songs, 1928-1973, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Contains Songs of Separations, for which lyrics were written by Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, and others. Other lyricists include

Kate Chapin and Verna Arvey. Also includes From the Hearts of Women, Plainchant for America, Breath of A Rose, and a collection of Still's songs in Twelve Negro Spirituals published by Handy Brothers Publishing. Also contains folk songs composed by Still.

A-W, 1928-1973, undated

Box 11

**Physical Description:** 4 folders

### **Spiritual arrangements, 1938-1981, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Includes an original of Ah Got a Home In-A Dat Rock printed by Charles Pace and W.C. Handy. Lyrics for some works were written by Verna Arvey. Contains some fragments.

A-W, 1938-1981, undated

Box 11

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

G-S, 1941, undated

Box 24

### **Symphonies, 1928-1946, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Includes full symphonies and symphonic poems, such as Darker America and Kaintuck The composer's notes for Symphony No.2 are present.

A-S, undated

Box 11

A-S, , 1928-1946, undated

Box 24

**Physical Description:** 4 folders

Sundated

Box 25

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

### **Miscellaneous, 1947-1975, undated**

#### **Scope and Contents note**

Contains band suites, solos pieces, sketches for Stormy Weather, children's music, and fragments.

Arranged alphabetically by title.

A-S, undated

Box 11

**Physical Description:** 2 folders

A-S, 1947-1975, undated	Box 25
<b>Physical Description:</b> 3 folders	
Miscellaneous, 1947-1975	Oversize-folder 1-2

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Recordings, 1935-1991, undated

### Scope and Contents note

Primarily recordings of Still's music in audio cassettes, compact disc, and phonograph record formats. The recordings have been grouped together according to their respective formats. Recordings are arranged alphabetically within each format. The performing artists have been noted when they could be readily identified.

Arranged alphabetically within each recording format.

### Audio Tapes

Biography in Sound: Leopold Stowkowski, Stowkowski, Leopold, 1954	Box 26
Calvacade of American Music, 1940	Box 26
<b>Physical Description:</b> 4 tapes	
Ecosphere, Agus, Ayke et al., 1991	Box 26
Minette Fontaine, undated (2 tapes)	Box 26
The Music of William Grant Still (2 tapes)	Box 26
Oboist Peter Christ, Christ, Peter with the Crystal Chamber Soloists, 1979	Box 26
Our Musical Past-Vol. 5, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 1935	Box 26
Natalie Hinderas plays Piano Music, Hinderas, Natalie, undated	Box 26
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, n.d	Box 26

Symphony No. 4, The Denver Symphony, undated	Box 26
Troubled Island, undated(2 tapes)	Box 26
William Grant Still, 1895-1978, The North Arkansas Symphony Orchestra et al., not before 1978	Box 26
William Grant Still Conducts William Grant Still, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, 1984	Box 26
William Grant Still Piano Music, Dominguez, Albert, undated	Box 26
William Grant Still: Strings, Keyboard and Harp, Kaufman, Louis et al., undated	Box 26
William Grant Still: Voices and Piano, William Grant Still Performing Arts Society, undated	Box 26

### Compact Discs

Africa: Piano Music of William Grant Still, Oldham, Denver, 1991	Box 26
Lenox Avenue: The Music of William Grant Still, The CBS Symphony Orchestra et al., 1991	Box 26
Louis Kaufmann, Violin: Historic Recordings of 20th Century American Works, Kaufman, Louis, 1990	Box 26
Oboist Peter Christ, Christ, Peter with the Crystal Chamber soloists, 1986	Box 26
Our Musical Past- Vol. 5, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 1935	Box 26
Walk as Children, Northern Arizona University Chorale, 1991	Box 26
Works by William Grant Still, Videmus, 1990	Box 26

### Phonograph Records

---

Art Songs by Black Composers, 1980	Box 27
<b>Physical Description:</b> 2 LPs	
CBS Records Black Composers Series, 1987	Box 27
<b>Physical Description:</b> 9 LPs	
William Grant Still 1895-1978, Ozark Chamber Players of the University Arkansas	Box 27
William Grant Still Conducts William Grant Still, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, 1984	Box 27
William Grant Still: Piano Music, Albert Dominguez, 1987	Box 27
William Grant Still: Strings, Keyboard and Harp, Louis Kaufmann et al., 1987	Box 27

[Return to Table of Contents](#)