



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Joe Adams Papers

NMAH.AC.0908

Leah Blue

2008

Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
P.O. Box 37012  
Suite 1100, MRC 601  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012  
Business Number: Phone: 202-633-3270  
Fax Number: Fax: 202-786-2453  
archivescenter@si.edu  
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical / Historical .....	2
Scope and Contents .....	3
Arrangement .....	4
Names and Subjects .....	
Container Listing .....	
Series 1: Photographs, 1947 - 1980 .....	5
Series 2: Scrapbooks, circa 1947-1954 .....	7

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Joe Adams Papers
<b>Date:</b>	1948-1980
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0908
<b>Creator:</b>	Adams, Joe, 1922- Morehead, Howard, 1926-2003
<b>Extent:</b>	1 Cubic foot (3 boxes and 1 oversize folder)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	Photographs, scrapbooks, and other materials documenting the career of Joe Adams, a Los Angeles radio announcer and movie and television actor, who later became Ray Charles's manager.

---

## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Joe Adams.

### Separated Materials

The Division of Culture and the Arts (now Division of Cultural and Community Life) holds artifacts related to this collection, including three jackets and one blue tuxedo worn by Joe Adams during his onstage career with Ray Charles and two scripts from the movie *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and the Broadway musical, *Jamaica*. See accession number 2005.3098.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed by Leah Blue (intern), 2008; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

### Preferred Citation

Joe Adams Papers, 1948-1980, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

### Restrictions

Collection is open for research but is stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu) or 202-633-3270.

### Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

---

## Biographical / Historical

Joe Adams was born on April 11, 1924. A native of Los Angeles, California, he wanted to work in radio at a very young age. Despite the racial discrimination that existed in the radio and television industry, Adams pressed on, practicing public speaking in vacant lots. He also gained confidence serving domestically as a pilot with the 332nd Tuskegee Airmen Fighter Group during World War II. After his time in the service, Adams was able to get occasional radio work at Hollywood stations such as KFVB, KPAS, KFOX, and KGFJ. In 1946, Adams got the chance to host a fifteen minute radio show at KOWL. He also married his wife, Emma Millhouse, that year.

Within two years, Joe Adams was hosting the number one-rated live radio show in Los Angeles, and the show had expanded from fifteen minutes to five hours. Adams was also able to sign on fifty-six sponsors for his show, a number previously unheard of. This was the beginning of a career that would last for more than twenty years.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Adams garnered success both on the radio, the small screen, and the big screen. He had two television shows, Adams Alley and Joe Adams Presents, made famous for the many music and film stars that Adams featured. Some of the celebrities Adams hosted included Jerry Lewis, Duke Ellington, The Trenier Twins, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Count Basie. Ellington played two themes for Adams's shows, "Take the 'A' Train" and "Smada" ("Adams" backwards). Both songs were written by jazz great, Billy Strayhorn. In 1954, Adams fronted a band that was part of the first USO tour to entertain troops stationed in Korea. Among the band members was actress-turned-singer, Shirley Haven.

Adams opened a nightclub, Pigalle, which was wildly popular in Los Angeles. In addition to being one of the first radio personalities to do a simulcast radio and live show by appearing live at the Paramount Theater in downtown Los Angeles, Adams was the first African American to be featured in an on-air, West Coast network radio show.

Adams appeared in nearly thirty movies, including the hit *Carmen Jones* (1954), where he played Husky Miller, and the original version of *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). In 1958, Adams became the first African American to receive the Foreign Correspondents Award for Outstanding New Actors from the Hollywood Foreign Correspondents Association. The Foreign Correspondents Award would later be called The Golden Globe. In 1957, Adams retired from radio and television to star in the Broadway play, *Jamaica*, with Lena Horne and Ricardo Montalban.

Adams made many famous friends during his career in broadcasting and film; one of the best known was Ray Charles. After inviting Adams on tour in 1959, Charles asked Adams to become his manager. Adams agreed (although to date, Adams humorously claims, he was never formally hired), and he managed Charles until the musician's death in 2004. Adams helped position Charles for fame through such venues as a long line of Pepsi commercials and the creation of both a Ray Charles studio and a company. Adams even arranged for Charles to tour in South Africa, and he served as both the producer of the Ray Charles Show and the wardrobe designer for Charles and his backup singers, the Raelettes.

Adams also acquired expertise outside the broadcasting and music business. He became a licensed commercial pilot and an authority in law. His philanthropy and his tireless work for African Americans and inner-city communities have been recognized by many organizations, from the Egyptian Shriners to the Urban League. Even his home town of Los Angeles has recognized Adams's efforts, making March 14th the official "Joe Adams Day."

### Sources

The National Visionary Leadership Project. "Joe Adams." <http://www.visionaryproject.org/adamsjoe> (accessed June 20, 2008).

Ray Charles Official Website. "Joe Adams." [http://www.raycharles.com/the\\_legacy\\_joe\\_adams.html](http://www.raycharles.com/the_legacy_joe_adams.html) (accessed June 28, 2008).

---

## Scope and Contents

The collection is comprised of photographs, correspondence, certificates, magazines and scrapbooks of newspaper clippings dating from 1947-1980. The materials document Adams's career in radio and film, as well as touching upon his military experience with the Tuskegee Airmen. Various documents and newspaper features depict Adams's relationship with a multitude of local and national celebrities; of particular note is the long list of musicians represented, such as Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. Public figures, including several former mayors of Los Angeles and members of law enforcement, also appear.

The collection also includes magazines featuring articles on Adams and other celebrities and public figures. Adams appears in many advertisements for a variety of products that sponsored his radio shows. There are photographs, programs and advertisements for the movies, shows and plays in which Joe Adams appeared, including Disc Jockey and Carmen Jones. There is correspondence from public relations employees during the Ray Charles tour and from other radio personalities and journalists. There are also several certificates given in appreciation for Adams's community service. Newspaper articles and photographs feature "Joe Adams Day," declared by the mayor of Los Angeles, and document Adams's overseas USO tour to entertain the men and women of the Armed Forces, which was also broadcasted on Armed Forces Radio.

**Series 1, Photographs, circa 1947-1980; undated**, documents Joe Adams's personal and professional life. The photographs are arranged by subject, including Adams's work in radio and film, his public appearances, celebrities, Joe Adams Day, his work with the military and his later years. There is some overlap among the subject categories. The majority of the photographs cannot be dated. Featured programs, places, organizations and celebrities include the 7th United States Infantry Division, Emma Adams, Jim Ameche, Armed Forces Radio, Milton Berle, Eugene Biscailuz, Ruth Bowen, Fletcher Bowron, Tom Bradley, Tommy Butler, California Artichoke Foundation, Ray Charles, Nat King Cole, Paul Compton, Billy Daniels, Disc Jockey, the movie, Egyptian Shriners, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Suzette Gomez, Amos Green, Lionel Hampton, Eddie Harbin, Shirley Haven, Hollywood Foreign Correspondents Association, Lena Horne, Jamaica, the Broadway play, Joe Adams Day, Danny Kaye, KDAY radio, Korea, KOWL Radio, Joe Lewis, Julie London, Nellie Lutcher, Will Martin, Clarence Metcalf, Husky Miller, MGM Studios, Roy Milton, David "Fathead" Newman, One Night Stand radio program, Pantages Nightclub, Pigalle Nightclub, Pub of Pittsburg, Pa., Lillian Randolph, Willis Reed, "Sugar Ray" Robinson, Kenny Rogers, Timmie Rogers, Ruth Bowen Agency, Wylie "Captain Death" Seldon Jr., Lionel "Chico" Sesma, George "Geo" Shearing, Frank Sinatra, "Star of Stars" Charity Show, Barry Sullivan, The Trenier Twins, The Tuskegee Airmen, USO, Viscount Airlines, Ches Washington, Dinah Washington, and Ben Webster.

**Series 2, Scrapbooks, circa 1947-1954; undated**, consists of newspaper articles, photographs, advertisements, and playbills. The scrapbooks document Adams's start in radio, his permanent appointment to KOWL, his service in the military and the inner-city community, his unique perspective and his philanthropy. They contain newspaper advertisements for Adams's radio shows on KOWL and the Armed Forces Radio Broadcasts. The scrapbooks include advertisements for his television shows as well as events and benefits where Adams was the featured emcee. Ink drawings of Adams used to advertise various products also appear in the newspaper articles. There are news stories on Joe Adams Day, a bus accident involving Lionel Hampton, the release of Ray Charles's song "Georgia" (1979), and advertisements for the movies Carmen Jones and The Manchurian Candidate. Numerous photographs document Adams's broadcasts and musical performances domestically and abroad as well as his interactions with many celebrities in the musical world. Aside from some newspaper clippings that include the date of publication, the contents of the scrapbooks are not dated. Featured programs, places, organizations and figures include Emma Adams, Ira Adams, Don Allen, Armed Forces Radio, Pearl Bailey, George A. Baron, Count Basie, Harry Belafonte, Irvin Berman, Eugene Biscailuz, Manny Borun, Fletcher Bowron, Charley Browning, Carmen Jones, the movie, Ray Charles, Club de Lisa, Arthur Croghan, Clay Cunningham, Dorothy Dandridge, Sammy Davis Jr., Warren Dorn, Billy Eckstine, Egyptian Shriners, Bob Ellis, Kay Francis, Robert D. Funk, Georgia (by Ray Charles), Lee Gillette, Golden Grooves radio show, Curley Hamner, Lionel Hampton, Hunter Hancock, Addie Hansen, Leon Helflin, Billie Holiday, H. Claude Hudson, Jamaica, the Broadway play, Al Jarvis, Herb Jeffries, Joe Adams Day, Leon King, KOWL Radio, June Kristy, Chuck Landis, Mauri Lyn, The Manchurian Candidate, MGM Studios, Husky Miller, Lucky Millinder, Tim Moor, Otto Preminger, Paul Price, Lillian Randolph, Leonard J. Roach, Caesar Romero,

Nina Russell, Lionel "Chico" Sesma, Jerry Simons, Mike Thompson, Sonny Tufts, Sarah Vaughan, T-Bone Walker, Dinah Washington, Leon H. Washington Jr. and Artie Wayne.

**Series 3, Other Materials, 1948-1980; undated**, includes magazines, correspondence, certificates and newspaper articles. The magazine cover stories are dedicated to fashion or to public figures such as John F. Kennedy, but they each contain a feature on Joe Adams and his involvement in the broadcast industry and the jazz music scene. There are fashion photographic spreads using musical stars that Adams knew well such as Nat King Cole. Two certificates thank Adams for community service to the Hollywood Canteen and the Hollywood Junior Chamber of Commerce (the "Out of this World series" celebrity baseball game). The correspondence is from other members of the broadcasting industry and pertains to matters in and outside of the business realm. The series also contains publicity concerning Ray Charles's tour through South Africa and the story of how Adams came to be his manager. Aside from magazines and newspaper clippings where the date of publication is featured, the majority of these materials are not dated. Featured programs, places, organizations and figures include Ami Artzi, Eddie Chamblee, Ray Charles, The Ray Charles Band, Nat King Cole, Madi Comfort, The Cotton Club, Arthur Croghan, Hilary Falkow, Roberta Flack, Joe Greene, Hollywood Canteen, Hollywood Junior Chamber of Commerce, Lena Horne, Charlotte Moton Hubbard, Karen Hutchinson, Jamaica, the Broadway play, Lyndon B. Johnson, James Earl Jones, Danny Kaye, John F. Kennedy, Lew Lauria, Robert Lewis, Sonny Liston, Paul R. McClure, Ricardo Montalban, Willa Moultrie, Lee Harvey Oswald, Breau Palmer, and Jack Ruby.

---

## Arrangement

The collection is divided into three series.

Series 1, Photographs, circa 1947-1980

Series 2, Scrapbooks, circa 1947-1954; undated

Series 3, Other Materials, 1948-1980; undated

---

## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- African American radio stations
- Broadcasting
- Radio broadcasting

Types of Materials:

- Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.
- Photographs -- 20th century
- Scrapbooks -- 20th century

Names:

- Charles, Ray, 1930-2004

---

## Container Listing

### Series 1: Photographs, 1947 - 1980

Box 1, Folder 1	Radio personalities
Box 1, Folder 2	Public appearances and performances
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">Celebrities</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	<p><a href="#">Duke Ellington and / Joe Adams [handwritten script at bottom of print] [black and white photoprint, [ca. 1953]</a>  1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.)  Collector: Adams, Joe, 1922-  Language: English.  Notes: AC0908-0000003.tif (AC Scan No.)  Unrestricted research access on site by appointment. Gloves required with unprotected photographs.  NBC microphone between them.</p> <p>Names: Ellington, Duke, 1899-1974  Topic: African American musicians  Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1950-1960 -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin  Culture: African Americans</p>
Box 1, Folder 4	<a href="#">Joe Adams Day</a>
Box 1	<p><a href="#">Left to Right: Robert Funk, Mrs. Adams and Joe Adams at "Joe" Adams Blvd. on "Joe Adams Day", March 14, 1953. [black and white photoprint]</a>  1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.)  Collector: Adams, Joe, 1922-  Language: English.  Notes: AC0908-0000001.tif (AC Scan No.)  Unrestricted research access on site by appointment. Gloves required with unprotected photographs.</p> <p>Names: Adams, Joe, 1922-  Funk, Robert  Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1950-1960 -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin  Culture: African Americans</p>
Box 1, Folder 5	<a href="#">Military</a>
Box 1	<p><a href="#">Members of the Armed Forces and Joe Adams's band. Pictured are Joe Adams, Shriley Haven, Suzette Gomez, Tommy Butler, Eddie Harbin, Amos Green, Clarence Metcalf and others. [black and white photoprint]</a></p>

1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.)  
Collector: Adams, Joe, 1922-  
Language: English.  
Notes: AC0908-0000002.tif (AC Scan No.)  
Unrestricted research access on site by appointment. Gloves required with unprotected photographs.  
Undated picture.  
Names: Adams, Joe, 1922-  
Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1950-1960 -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin  
Culture: African Americans

Box 1, Folder 6      Later years

Box 2, Folder 3      Still image from Carmen Jones, 1954

Box 2, Folder 1-2      Joe Adams at radio studio, circa 1950s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



## Series 2: Scrapbooks, circa 1947-1954

Box 3, Folder 1	Scrapbook, circa 1948-1950; undated, pages 1-17
Box 3, Folder 2	Scrapbook, circa 1948-1950; undated, loose pages
Box 3, Folder 3	Scrapbook, circa 1947-1954; undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### 3: Other Materials, 1948 - 1980

Box 1, Folder 7	Certificates, 1950, undated
Box 1, Folder 8	Correspondence, 1948, 1950, 1952; undated
Box 1, Folder 9	Duke Magazine, 1957
Box 1, Folder 10	Newspaper articles, 1957, 1973-1974, 1980; undated
Box 2, Folder 4	Sepia Magazine, 1964
Map-folder 1	"Joe Adams on KOWL" (poster), 1949
Map-folder 1	Egyptian Temple Number 5, Eighth Shrine, Star of the Stars Benefit Show (program), 1960 February 15
Map-folder 1	"Folger Doorbell Ringers are Back! Listen to Joe Adams for Details and names of Winners on KOWL" (poster), circa 1950
Box 2, Folder 3	Ray Charles concert, undated