

Guide to the Gertrude Hoffman Collection

Brooklyn Public Library
Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Contact: Brooklyn Collection
Phone: 718.230.2762
Fax: 718.857.2245
Email: bceref@brooklynpubliclibrary.org
www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Finding aid prepared by Ivy Marvel.
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Gertrude Hoffman
Title: Gertrude Hoffman Collection
Date Span: 1908 - 1943
Abstract: The collection consists largely of publicity photographs of Gertrude Hoffman and of her dancing troupe, the Gertrude Hoffman Girls. Two scrapbooks compiled by Hoffman contain more candid photographs. Also included in the collection are newspaper clippings about Hoffman's career and ephemera from her various performances.
Quantity: 3 flat boxes
Location: Brooklyn Collection, Map Room, shelf
Repository: Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection
Reference Code: BC0146

Biographical History

American vaudeville dancer and choreographer Gertrude Hoffman (sometimes spelled Hoffmann) was born Catherine Gertrude Hayes on May 7, 1885 in San Francisco, California, to parents John and Catherine Hayes. At her mother's urging, Gertrude – whose early stage name was “Kitty” – took dancing lessons as a young girl and soon began auditioning for roles in the local theaters. She made her vaudeville debut in 1899 at Frederic Belasco's Alcazar Theatre. Gertrude met composer and arranger Max Hoffman while touring as a dancer, and two married in 1901. Hoffman gave birth to a son, Max Jr., in 1902.

Hoffman started out as a dancer and impressionist on the vaudeville stage; in her early years she performed imitations of other, more famous performers, including Eva Tanguay and Anna Held. Hoffman worked with the latter in the Flo Ziegfeld's *A Parisian Model* in 1906, shocking many by dressing in drag and dancing with Held. Programs from Hoffman's appearances on Brooklyn stages during this period can be found in our [Brooklyn Theater Playbills and Programs Collection](#). She made her first major impression on audiences in 1908, with her scandalous rendition of the then-popular “Dance of the Seven Veils”, adapted from the biblical story of Salome. Hoffman was repeatedly arrested when touring the United States with the dance, although some historians suggest that the arrests were arranged by vaudeville impresario Oscar Hammerstein to drum up publicity. Despite the scandals, this period marked Hoffman's change of focus

from dancing as entertainment to dancing as a high art. Hoffman also gained fame when she partnered with theatrical producer Morris Guest to introduce American audiences to the much-lauded Russian ballet company, the Ballets Russes, in 1911 by hiring European dancers to perform pieces from the company, albeit without choreographer Michel Fokine's permission.

Hoffman continued to perform through the 1910s, although by the mid-1920s she had largely given up her role as a dancer to concentrate instead on directing and choreographing her own group. She formed the Gertrude Hoffman Girls dance troupe during this time – a chorus line of 18 to 25 dancing girls whose stage act also included fencing and aerial acrobatics. This group performed on New York stages as well as at Paris's famed Moulin Rouge nightclub through the mid-1930s.

Hoffman largely disappeared from the stage after the 1930s. She died of a heart attack on October 21, 1966, in Hollywood, California, following the death of her husband and collaborator, Max Hoffman, in 1963.

Sources:

Cullen, Frank, Florence Hackman, and Donald McNeilly. "Gertrude Hoffman" *Vaudeville, Old & New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Fields, Armond. *Women Vaudeville Stars: Eighty Biographical Profiles*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2006.

Gertrude Hoffman obituary. *Dance* magazine. December, 1966.

Kendall, Elizabeth. *Where She Danced*. New York: Knopf, 1979.

Mordden, Ethan. *Ziegfeld: The Man Who Invented Show Business*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Trav S D. *No Applause, Just Throw Money, Or, the Book That Made Vaudeville Famous: A High-Class, Refined Entertainment*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005.

Scope and Content

The Gertrude Hoffman Collection covers the period from 1908 to 1943, which roughly coincides with the span of Hoffman's professional career. The collection consists largely of publicity photographs of Hoffman herself and of her troupe, the Gertrude Hoffman Girls, including both studio photographs and images of the performances themselves. There are several headshots of individual performers from the Gertrude Hoffman Girls – when labeled, their names are listed in this finding aid. Two scrapbooks, presumably compiled by Hoffman herself, include snapshots, newspaper clippings, and ephemera from the Hoffman Girls' European tours. Although there is little coverage of Hoffman's personal life in the collection, one folder does contain several photographs and letters of her son, Max Hoffman, Jr. and there are additional family photographs in Box 3, Folder 15. Programs and articles from the Gertrude Hoffman Girls' European tours are often in French, with English annotations by Hoffman.

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

Collection is located in the Brooklyn Collection at the Central Branch at Grand Army Plaza. The collection may only be used in the library and is not available through interlibrary loan. Requests to view the collection must be made at least 48 hours in advance of visit.

Use Restrictions

While many items in the Brooklyn Collection are unrestricted, we do not own reproduction rights to all materials. Be aware of the several kinds of rights that might apply: copyright, licensing and trademarks. The borrower assumes all responsibility for copyright questions.

Access Points

Subject Headings:

Choreographers
Gertrude Hoffmann Company
Gertrude Hoffmann Girls
Hoffmann, Gertrude
Vaudeville--United States
Women choreographers
Women dancers

Related Materials

In the Brooklyn Collection:

[Brooklyn Theater Playbills and Programs Collection, 1875-1972](#)

Hoffman, Gertrude biographical file

At other repositories:

[The Gertrude and Max Hoffman Papers.](#) Wake Forest University, Z. Smith Reynolds Library.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

This collection should be cited as the Gertrude Hoffman Collection, Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection.

Arrangement

The collection was maintained in its original order.

Box 1

Folder 1: Experience and Credits

Advertisement from Hippodrome, Brighton	1 page	August 1939
Experience and credits	7 pages	c. 1934
Review	2 pages	n.d.

Folder 2: Max Hoffman, Jr.

Newspaper clippings	6 sheets	c. 1942
Letters by and about Max, Jr.	3 sheets	n.d.

Photographs of Max, Jr., professional and personal Photo negative	22 photographs 1 negative	n.d. n.d.
Folder 3: Individual Hoffman Girls, 1 of 2		
8 x 10 promotional photographs of women in troop Some have names on verso. Listing of full names: Virginia Pearson Lois Buel Dorothy Thomas Patricia Bowman (signed, to Max Hoffman) Rosalie Reitter	27 photographs	mostly undated 1926
Folder 4: Individual Hoffman Girls, 2 of 2		
Oversize promotional photographs of women in troop Some have names on verso. Listing of full names: Emma Kligge Gloria McDonald Helen Sebley Anna Mayer Dorothy Lockwood Eleanor Anderson	17 photographs (2 verso)	undated
Folder 5: Routines		
Photographs of Gertrude Hoffman dancers performing	18 photographs	c. 1934
Folder 6: Hoffman Girls, 1938		
Rehearsal photographs of troupe dancing with trapeze equipment, taken by Arthur Sasse	18 photographs	1938
Photographs of Gertrude Hoffman at Casino de Paris	3 photographs	n.d.
Folder 7: Hoffman Girls, Group Photos		
Photographs of troupe on beach	2 photographs	c. 1934
Photograph of troupe on street in London	1 photograph	c. 1930s
Studio photographs of troupe	3 photos, 1 oversize	n.d.
Photographs of troupe performing	4 photos, 3 oversize	n.d.
Folder 8: Hoffman Portraits I*		
Professional portraits of Gertrude Hoffman	34 photographs	n.d.
Photo of Hoffman as Eve Tanguay	2 photographs	Nov. 1921
*Many images in this folder are very damaged. Use special care in handling		
Folder 9: Hoffman Portraits II		
Professional portraits of Gertrude Hoffman	15 photographs	c. 1914
Photo of Hoffman as Anna Held	1 photograph	n.d.
Postcard images of Gertrude Hoffman	2 postcards	n.d.
Print illustration of woman on horse	1 print	n.d.
Folder 10: Hoffman Portraits III		
Professional portraits of Gertrude Hoffman	23 photographs	n.d.

Folder 11: Hoffman Portraits IV Professional portraits of Gertrude Hoffman, all 8x10, several annotated	24 photographs	n.d.
 Box 2		
“La Saison de Cannes” in English and French, Hoffman Girls featured on page 9	11x14 magazine	Feb. 1934
Scrapbook I, “Les Gertrude Hoffman Girls du Casino de Paris” Loose and pasted photographs Many loose pages Text mostly in French Annotations by Hoffman in English	11x14 scrapbook	1934
“Restaurant Ambassadeurs Saison 1934” program Text in French and English	8.5x12 pamphlet	1934
Scrapbook II* Newspaper clippings from national tours Photographs “New College Inn Crazy Show” program French tour clippings Very large Hippodrome poster *Material is extremely fragile. Please use caution when handling.	13x15	1921 – 1933
 Box 3		
Folder 12: Mounted Photographs I	5 photos	c.1910
Folder 13: Mounted Photographs II	5 photos	c. 1910 – 1912
Folder 14: Group Photographs, oversized	8 photos, most oversize	c.1930s
Folder 15: Personal Photographs 3.5x4.5 snapshots Mounted portraits	7 snapshots 3 portraits	n. d. n. d.
Folder 16: Ephemera & Group Photographs Brighton Hippodrome poster Hoffman Girls photographs	2 3.5x14in posters 26 photos, some duplicates	n. d. c. 1930s
Folder 17: Newspaper Clippings I	14 pages of clippings	1915 – 1943
Folder 18: Newspaper Clippings II “Well-watered woman” article	7 pages 4 pages	1908 – 1921 1913
Folder 19: Newspaper Clippings III	6 pages, some duplicates	1908 – 1938

Folder 20: Newspaper Clippings IV	16 pages	
Folder 21: Advertisements		
Brighton Hippodrome flier	9 5.5x8.5 fliers	August 1939
Brighton Hippodrome poster	1 10x15 poster	August 1939
Lykens & Levy poster	1 11.5x14 poster	n.d.
Folder 22: Ideas for Numbers		
<i>The Dance</i> magazine cover	10x13	Feb. 1929
<i>New York Times Magazine</i> clipping, “Our Own Skytroops”	11.5x15 (folded)	Oct. 1941
Parachute sketch	20x26 (folded)	c.1941
Sketches on Associated Musicians of New York stationery	2 7x8.5 sheets	c.1930s
“We’re Going to Balance the Budget” lyrics	8.5x11	n.d.
Magazine clippings	3 8.5x11 pages	n.d.
Sheet music	9.5x12.5	n.d.
Loose scrapbook pages of newspaper clippings	90 13x16 pages	1913 – 1914