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Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the
Cochran family papers

1857-1974

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Compiled by Alison Dundy, Palmer School, Long Island University, 2013 and Laura Morris, May 2012

Summary

Creator: Cochran family

Title: Cochran family papers, 1857-1974

Size: 3.19 linear feet (8 boxes)

Source: The provenance of this collection is not known.

Abstract: The Cochran family papers primarily document the lives of Aso-Neith Cochran and her daughter, Vota Cochran. Aso-Neith was an occultist whose teachings and readings centered on musical vibrations, color, and numbers; she was also an early adherent of the Bahá'í faith. Vota was a childhood musical prodigy who traveled frequently with her mother. The papers include correspondence, photographs, diaries, and Aso-Neith's occultist writings.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying and photography will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Cochran family papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Custodial history: There is no documentation of the custodial history of these papers.

Processing note: The Cochran family papers arrived in no discernible order. They have been arranged alphabetically according to the family member to whom they pertain, and photographs have been grouped together.

Related collections

Katherine S. Dreier papers / Société Anonyme archive, 1818-1952. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

Creator history

The Cochran family papers include materials from these family members: Edward Colcord Cochran (1817-1866); John Webster Cochran (1844-1929); Asenath Williams Woodcock Cochran, later known as Aso-Neith Cochran (1851-1931); Adelaide Fredrika Cochran (1879-1942); and Olea Wanda LaFayette Cochran, known as Vota Cochran (1884-1975).

Edward Colcord Cochran was born in Scarborough, Maine on February 23, 1817. He married Joanna Gordon Nichols on September 13, 1835 in Roxbury, Massachusetts. They had ten children, one of whom was John Webster Cochran. Edward died in Illinois on April 6, 1866.

John Webster Cochran was born in Platteville, Wisconsin on December 4, 1844. He served as a Private in the 146th Illinois Infantry in the American Civil War and, at an unknown date, married Asenath Williams Woodcock. They had two daughters. John Webster Cochran died in New York City on January 1, 1929.

Asenath Williams Woodcock Cochran (later known as Aso-Neith) was born in Jackson, Missouri on June 16, 1851 to Elizabeth Pearson Woodcock and Cephas Parker Woodcock. She married John Webster Cochran at an unknown date; by 1880 the couple had moved to Seattle, Washington. There they had two daughters, Adelaide Fredrika Cochran and Olea Wanda LaFayette Cochran (known as Vota). The family moved to New York City at the turn of the twentieth century and the parents separated. Asenath changed her name to Aso-Neith Neypa Cochran and began to develop occultist theories concerning "universal vibration," numbers, music, and names. She published some of these theories as "Aso-Neith Cryptograms" and cultivated an international spiritual following. She traveled to Europe on numerous occasions with her youngest daughter, Vota, and became a devout follower and activist for the Bahai faith. Among Aso-Neith's followers and clients were numerous prominent New Yorkers (including Anna Dodge McCullough and "Mrs. Baruch," presumably Annie Baruch), Hollywood actors and actresses (including Mary Pickford and Eva Casanova Tellegen, wife of actor Lou Tellegen), and musicians (including violinist and composer Arthur Hartmann). On at least one occasion, Aso-Neith encountered legal difficulties as a result of her occultist teachings: a May 6, 1926 article in *The New York Times* describes her 1918 arrest on a charge of fortune-telling, as well as the large trust fund left to her by devotee Anna Dodge McCullough. Aso-Neith Cochran died in New York City on March 21, 1931.

Adelaide Fredrika Cochran, the older daughter of John and Asenath Cochran, was born in Seattle, Washington on February 22, 1879. She was a musical prodigy and performed widely in the Pacific Northwest from a young age. Adelaide married music teacher Charles M. Pond, Jr. in May 1899, and they had a daughter, Ruona, in 1901. Adelaide Fredrika Cochran died in New York City on May 16, 1942.

Adelaide's younger sister, Olea Wanda LaFayette Cochran (known as Vota) was born in Seattle on March 4, 1884. Like her sister, Vota was a musical prodigy who sang and performed solos and duets on multiple instruments. The two sisters performed on stage in Seattle when Adelaide was eight years old and Vota was just three. Vota moved to New York City with her mother around 1900, and they traveled together to Germany and other European countries in the first decade of the twentieth century. Vota would later study at Columbia University, and she appears to have lived in Butler Hall, on Columbia's campus, until her death on February 25, 1975.

Scope and content note

The Cochran family papers are arranged according to the family member to whom they pertain and listed alphabetically under each personal name. Photographs are grouped separately, since they pertain to numerous individuals.

Materials pertaining to sisters Adele and Vota Cochran's musical career are filed together and consist of posters and programs for their childhood performances in Seattle, Vancouver, and Port Gamble, Washington Territory from 1886 to 1887.

Aso-Neith Cochran's papers consist of clippings, correspondence, diaries, notebooks, Bahá'í texts, and extensive occultist writings. The clippings generally pertain to occultist topics and contain several newspaper articles about Aso-Neith's cryptograms and numerological readings of names.

Correspondence is with various individuals, including actress Mary Pickford and Eva Casanova Tellegen, wife of actor Lou Tellegen. Aso-Neith kept the diaries in this collection during European travels with her daughter, Vota, and the diaries include many photographs. Several of her notebooks pertain to specific devotees, for whom she gave individual spiritual readings: Anna Dodge McCullough (whom Aso-Neith named Vahdah) and a Mrs. Baruch, presumably Annie Baruch. Aso-Neith's writings include two unpublished manuscripts, *1,001 Dreams and their Interpretations* and *The Effect of Music on Human Life*, as well as many of her self-published cryptograms (formally titled *The Aso-Neith Cryptogram of Numbers and Letters and Their Significance*) and writings which appear to be spiritual readings for individual clients and devotees.

Papers pertaining to John Webster Cochran include an annotated book, *The Evidence of Prophecy*, genealogical papers, a legal document concerning his case before the Minnesota Supreme Court, and materials concerning his pension as a veteran of the American Civil War.

Vota Cochran's papers are primarily composed of astrological readings, correspondence, school materials, and scripts. Correspondence comprises the bulk of her papers and includes letters to and from Dr. Edward C. Getsinger, Anne Morgan, Felix J. Frazer, Katherine S. Dreier, Maxwell Stewart Simpson, as well as extensive correspondence with two individuals: Japanese scholar Shutaro Tomimas and Arfa-Es Sultaneh, A. M. Khan de Farrokh, the first Iranian student in the United States and a professor at the University of Tehran. Sultaneh's letters to Vota are romantic in nature and span much of her adult life.

Among the photographs is a pristine 1891 family photograph album which holds photographs of the young Cochran sisters playing their musical instruments. There are also personal photographs of Vota Cochran with family and friends, including Shutaro Tomimas, as well as inscribed portraits of the following actors, musicians, and artists: Georgette Leblanc, William Farnum, Michel Barroy, Robert Taylor, Ted Shawn, Mary Pickford, Ruano Bogislav, Fritz Kneisler, Arthur Hartman, Robert Schmidt, and Homer Davenport. There are also several photographs taken at the Baruch estate on Long Island, "Bagatelle," in 1930.

Arrangement

The Cochran family papers are arranged according to the family member to whom they pertain and listed alphabetically. Photographs have been grouped together and follow the personal papers.

Key terms

Subjects

Bahai Faith
Fortune-telling by names
Music and occultism
Numerology
Prophecies (Occultism)
Prophecy

Names

Cochran family
Cochran, Asenath Williams Woodcock

Cochran, John Webster, 1844-1929
Cochran, Vota
Columbia University -- Students
Getsinger, Edward C. (Edward Christopher), 1866
-1935
Tomimas, Shutaro

Special formats

Photograph albums
Photographs
Scripts (documents)

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Adele and Vota Cochran--Musical Performance Programs and Posters, 1886-1887, undated
Aso-Neith Cochran
- b.1 f.2 Addresses, undated
- b.1 f.3 *A Quiet Week-End* by Orea E. Windust (inscribed copy), 1922
- b.1 f.4 Articles About, 1903-1923
- b.1 f.5-8 Bahá'í Texts, 1902-1920, undated
- b.1 f.9 Booklets and Pamphlets, 1903-1926, undated
- b.1 f.10 Clippings, 1901-1931, undated
- b.1 f.11-12 Correspondence--Letters Received, 1892-1931, undated
- b.1 f.13 Correspondence--Letters Written, 1906-1930, undated
- b.1 f.14 Diary, ca. 1903-1907 (Includes many photographs)
- b.2 f.1 Diary, ca. 1907-1908 (Includes many photographs)
- b.2 f.2 Drawing of Violinist by Homer Davenport, 1908
- b.2 f.3 Lecture Invitation, undated
Invitation to Aso-Neith's talk about "the translation of numbers into color and musical tone through vibration," given at the home of Mrs. E. R. Mathews
- b.2 f.4 Letterhead, undated
- b.8 f.3 Musical Score with Cryptogram, undated
Notebooks
- b.2 f.5-6 General, 1902-1928, undated
- b.2 f.7-8 Concerning Mrs. Baruch, 1921, undated
- b.2 f.9-10 Concerning Vahdah McCullough (Mrs. Anna Dodge McCullough), 1919
- b.3 f.1 Poems Read at Decoration Day, 1882-1883
- b.3 f.2 Travel Souvenirs--Ships' Passenger Lists, 1903, 1906
Writings
- b.3 f.3 "1,001 Dreams and Their Interpretations", 1919
- b.3 f.4-8 Cryptograms, 1903, 1912, undated
- b.3 f.9 "The Effect of Music on Human Life", undated
- b.3 f.10-15 Writings and Lecture Notes, 1912-1923, undated
Note that many of the writings in these folders and in the following box appear to have been created for a specific individual, as part of Aso-Neith's spiritual readings for clients
- b.4 f.1 Writings and Lecture Notes, 1912-1923, undated
- b.4 f.2 Edward Colcord Cochran--Poems, 1857-1858
John W. Cochran
- b.4 f.3 *The Evidence of Prophecy* (inscribed and annotated by Cochran), 1897
- b.4 f.4 Genealogical Information, undated
- b.4 f.5 Legal Document--Statement of Case and Bill of Exceptions to Minnesota Supreme Court, 1869
- b.4 f.6 Notebook, 1909

John W. Cochran (cont.)

b.4 f.7 Pension Certificate and Correspondence, 1903-1914
Includes materials related to the 1913 Gettysburg reunion, held for veterans of the American Civil War

b.4 f.8 Stationary for Law Office, undated

Vota Cochran

b.4 f.9 Address Book, ca. 1904 (Includes two photographs)

b.4 f.10 Astrology Readings, 1926

b.4 f.11 Civilian Air Raid Protection Training Materials, 1942

Correspondence--Letters Received

b.4 f.12-15 General, 1904-1919

b.5 f.1-5 General, 1920-1974, undated

b.5 f.6-14 From Arfa-Es Sultaneh, 1906, 1930-1962, undated

b.5 f.15-16 From Shutaro Tomimas, 1920-1924

b.6 f.1-2 From Shutaro Tomimas, 1925-1926, 1952, undated

b.6 f.3-4 Correspondence--Letters Written, 1903-1965, undated

b.6 f.5 Diary, 1946

b.6 f.6 Jewelry Illustrations, undated

b.6 f.7 Letterhead and Calling Cards, undated

b.8 f.2 Musical Score from Arthur Hartmann, 1904

b.6 f.8 Notebooks, 1912, undated

b.6 f.9 Rent Receipts, 1970-1973

b.6 f.10 School Materials, 1916-1925, undated

b.6 f.11-12 School Notebooks, 1924, undated

Scripts

b.6 f.13 *Sweet Land* by Conrad Seiler, ca. 1935

b.6 f.14 *The Fortieth Door* by Mary Hastings Bradley, undated

b.6 f.15 *The Idle Inn: A Play in Four Acts* by Perez Hirschbein, ca. 1921

Photographs

b.7 f.1-5 General, 1879-1936, undated

b.8 f.1 Cochran Family Album, 1891

b.8 f.4 Portrait of Arthur Hartmann, Inscribed to Vota Cochran, 1906