



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Fanny Fields papers

1891-1961 [bulk 1900-1913]

*T-Mss 2012-033

As there was no discernible original order, materials were arranged by document type. Posters were originally placed at the back of the scrapbook labeled "Invoices," but were moved to more appropriately-sized housing. Additional material from the collection processed in 2015 by Weatherly Stephan. Portions of the papers were previously cataloged individually. Classmarks for these materials are noted in the container list.

Summary

Creator: Fields, Fanny

Title: Fanny Fields papers

Date: 1891-1961 [bulk 1900-1913]

Size: 3.7 linear feet (11 boxes, 1 volume)

Source: Unknown.

Abstract: Happy Fanny Fields (born Fanny Furman, circa 1881-1961) was an American actress, dancer, and comedian who found great success in British pantomime theater in the first decade of the twentieth century. The collection documents Fields's professional life in New York and Europe, with an emphasis on her career in Britain. The bulk of the materials are scrapbooks, writings, and photographs, with contracts, letters, programs, and posters also included.

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Creator History

Happy Fanny Fields (circa 1881-1961, born Fanny Furman) was an American variety-show actress, dancer, and comedian who found great success in the British pantomime theaters of the early 1900s.

Fields's specialty was an impression of a naïve, working-class American-Dutch woman. This character, sometimes called Gretchen, spent much time contemplating the actions of a sweetheart named Schultz who Fields described as "the type of Dutchman who thought slowly, spoke badly, and drank lager perfectly." Clog dancing was another significant component of the act. The Dutch character was sometimes inserted into larger shows, as was the case in the Theatre Royal Glasgow's 1909-1910 production of the pantomime *Aladdin*.

In 1913, Fields starred in a silent film titled *Happy Fanny Fields and the Four Little Dutchmen*. That same year, Fields abruptly retired from the stage and returned to New York to marry Dr. Abraham J. Rongy. Fields died in New York City in 1961.

Scope and Content Note

The Fanny Fields papers date from 1891 to 1961 (bulk dates: 1900-1913) and document Fields's performance career in the United States and Britain as well as her continuing popularity after her retirement. The bulk of the collection consists of scrapbooks, photographs, and writings. Letters from Fields's fans; journals and datebooks listing her work schedules; and contracts for her performances are also included.

Four scrapbooks contain clippings, photographs, programs, promotional materials, and a small number of letters and telegrams from family and well-wishers. These volumes are primarily comprised of clippings documenting Fields's career in Britain in the first decade of the 20th century. The clippings include reviews of performances, promotional pieces, interviews, and celebrity news items. Her retirement from the stage in 1913 is also well-documented. The scrapbooks feature publicity photos and illustrations of Fields, mostly in her Dutch costume.

Loose photographs complement those found in the scrapbooks, with professional portraits and production shots as well as autographed portraits of Fields's contemporaries.

Writings include jokes, monologues, songs, toasts, and bits composed by Fields and others that were used in her stage acts.

Additionally, the collection contains loose programs from performances featuring Fields and posters advertising specific performances, such as *Aladdin*, and the Dutch character generally.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged alphabetically by document type.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)
Contracts
Photographs
Posters
Scrapbooks
Theater programs

Subjects

Pantomime (Christmas Entertainment)

Vaudeville

Container List

- b. 5 f. 1 Autograph Album 1905-1911
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,561
- b. 5 f. 2 Clippings and Programs 1905-1961
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,562
- b. 5 f. 3-5 Contracts 1890s-1910s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,561
- b. 6 f. 1 Ephemera 1890s-1910s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,564
- b. 6 f. 2-5 Journals and Datebooks 1900-1945
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,562
- b. 7 f. 1 Letters Received 1898-1955
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,155
- b. 10 Letters of Appreciation 1901-1913
v. 1-2 8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,155
- b. 1 f. 1 Menu 1958
- b. 2 f. 1 *Newspaper-- Anglo-American Press* 1901
Photographs
- b. 7 f. 2-4 1890s-1920s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,563
- b. 8 f. 1-2 1890s-1920s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,563
- b. 11 f. 1-7 1890s-1920s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,563
- b. 1 f. 6 Curtains at the Coliseum Theatre
- b. 1 f. 2-5 Posters 1909-1913
- b. 2 f. 2-5 Programs 1901-1912
- b. 1 f. 7 Programs 1912
- b. 3 Scrapbook 1891-1935
- b. 4 Scrapbooks 1900-1913
- v. 1 Scrapbook 1911-1918
MWEZ + n.c. 19,564
- b. 8 f. 3-5 Writings 1900-1950s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,562 and 8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,601
- b. 9 f. 1-3 Writings 1900-1950s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 19,601