

# **Guide to the Smith and Dale Papers, 1903-1981**

**\*T-Mss 1981-015**

**Billy Rose Theatre Collection**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York**

## **Contact Information**

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
Billy Rose Theatre Collection  
40 Lincoln Center Plaza  
New York, New York 10023-7498  
Phone: 212 870-1639  
Fax: 212.870.1868  
Email: [theatrediv@nypl.org](mailto:theatrediv@nypl.org)  
Web address: <http://www.nypl.org/research/lpa/the/the.html>

Processed by: Lee Spilberg  
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## Descriptive Summary

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Smith and Dale Papers</b>
<b>Collection ID:</b>	<b>*T-Mss 1981-015</b>
<b>Creator:</b>	<b>Smith, Joe and Dale, Charlie</b>
<b>Extent:</b>	<b>2 linear feet (3 boxes)</b>
<b>Repository:</b>	<b>Billy Rose Theatre Collection. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts</b>

**Abstract:** Joe Smith and Charlie Dale were partners in one of vaudeville's most famous and successful comedy acts, later translating many of their most popular sketches to other media, including radio, motion pictures and television. The Smith and Dale Papers include contracts, correspondence, photographs, scripts and other professional material from the team, as well as clippings documenting their joint career and Smith's activities after Dale's death.

## Administrative Information

### Access

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

### Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

### Preferred Citation

Smith and Dale Papers, \*T-Mss 1981-015, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

### Custodial History

The Smith and Dale Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Collection in 1981 by The Actors' Fund of America.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed and catalogued in 2006.

## Biographical Note

When vaudeville was the primary form of public entertainment in America, Smith and Dale were among its most important stars. As they traveled across the country, audiences enjoyed their many signature comedy sketches, in which a simple relationship, such as doctor / patient or teacher / student, would serve as the basis for a dizzying stream of jokes, ranging from the silly to the philosophical.

Smith and Dale met as teenagers in New York City in 1898. Smith was born Joseph Sultzer in 1884 and Dale was born Charles Marks in 1881. As they told it throughout their professional lives, they had each rented bicycles for the afternoon and accidentally crashed them into each other. As they dragged their damaged bicycles back to the shop where they had both rented them, the two boys argued and insulted each other. When they arrived at the shop, the owner heard them arguing, told them they sounded like the comedy team Weber and Fields and lent them a tandem bike for free, on the condition that they stop fighting and get to know one another. They soon discovered a shared interest in performing, decided to join forces and remained a team for the next seventy-three years.

Once they began seeking work in vaudeville, they needed cards to identify them and their act. When they went to commission cards from a printer, they saw he was offering a steep discount on cards for "Smith and Dale", an act that had never picked up the cards they had commissioned. Upon learning the price of new cards, Sultzer and Marks became Smith and Dale on the spot.

The team joined forces with two other young men to create a variety act known as The Avon Comedy Four. Smith and Dale incorporated their comedy sketches and after some musical numbers by Harry Goodwin and Irving Kaufman, all four joined together for a musical comedy finale.

Smith and Dale became major stars in vaudeville, and their sketches were nationally famous. Audiences around the country knew and loved *School Days*, *The Tax Examiner* and *Dr. Kronkhite and His Only Living Patient*, among others. The nature of vaudeville suited Smith and Dale very well. They were perfectionists, preferring to hone their material until it was exactly as they wanted it. Traveling the vaudeville circuit from coast to coast allowed them to perfect their sketches without any concern about repeating themselves.

Once vaudeville was rendered extinct by the double blow of network radio and talking pictures, Smith and Dale lost their place as headlining stars. They continued to work and were always popular and well-remembered, but the new media did not lend themselves to perfectionism. Once a sketch had been aired on radio or, later, television, it could not be repeated the next time. Mass media consumed material infinitely faster than vaudeville had, and Smith and Dale had no interest in competing at that pace. They made periodic appearances on radio and television, recreating their old sketches until Dale's death in 1971. Smith continued making public appearances and performing comedy, including many recordings for Dial-a-Joke, until his death in 1981.

Neil Simon's play, *The Sunshine Boys*, which told the story of a vaudeville team's reunion, was loosely based on Smith and Dale's professional history. Unlike Simon's volatile Lewis and Clark, however, Smith and Dale were quite close throughout their partnership.

### Scope and Content Note

The Smith and Dale Papers reflect the later life of Joe Smith, including correspondence, clippings and photographs from the 1970s. There is older material included as well, documenting the careers of Smith and Dale, but this older material is far less extensive, most likely the remains of what Smith saved when he entered The Actors Fund Home in Englewood, New Jersey. The collection mixes personal and professional subjects, including both Smith's and Dale's marriage licenses, poems from Smith to his wife and friends, as well as handwritten copies of Smith and Dale comedy sketches.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	Call Sheet, 1975 For <i>The Sunshine Boys</i> scene featuring Joe Smith, not included in final film
		Clippings
	2	1918-1968
	3	1970-1980
	4	Undated
	5	Contracts, 1948-1972
		Correspondence
	6	A-C, 1937-1979 Includes Smith's correspondence with AFTRA and AGVA, New Jersey Governor Brendan Byrne, Bennett Cerf and Executive Producer Joe Hamilton of <i>The Carol Burnett Show</i> . Also included are a copy of a letter from Irving Caesar, recopied by Joe Smith, and a joking response to a Vincent Canby review
	7	D-G, 1952-1979 Includes letters from Ellbar Productions regarding a Barbra Streisand television special, The Friars Club and a high school class Joe Smith visited
	8	H-M, 1937-1980 Includes letters from J. Edgar Hoover, John Lahr, William Morris, producers of <i>The Jackie Gleason Show</i> and a copy of a letter from George Jessel
	9	N-S, 1937-1980 Includes a letter from Mary Pickford
	10	T-Z, 1943-1981; Undated Includes correspondence from Harry Truman
	11	Unidentified, 1967-1980; Undated
	12	Form Replies, 1977; Undated Copies of general greetings from Joe Smith
	13	Ephemera, Undated Includes a one-dollar bill with the last line of the <i>Dr. Kronkhite</i> sketch written on it, and a

joke "free ticket"

#### Financial

- 14 General, 1966-1967  
Includes invoice for Smith's wife's cemetery monument, a stub from a residual payment and a notice from the Social Security Administration
- 15 Income Tax Documentation, 1968-1969
- 16 Medical, 1967-1969
- 17 Receipts, 1970; Undated
- 18 Stock Certificates, 1930  
Smith and Dale's official certificates of stock in their own vaudeville act, Avon Theatricals, Inc.
- 19 Hackensack Public Schools, 1980  
Teaching evaluation of Smith's friend, Terry McGrath, and a free calendar
- 20 Invitations and Guest Lists, 1932; 1973-1978
- 21 Membership Cards, 1947-1964; Undated  
Joe Smith's cards
- 22 Pamphlets, 1980; Undated  
Informational literature on painting, typing, Morven House and The Friars Club
- 23 Personal Documents, 1903-1944  
Marriage licenses for both Smith and Dale; birth certificate copy and Social Security cards for Mrs. Smith
- 24 Personal Notes, Undated  
Includes telephone numbers, medical instructions (Dale), list of charitable donations and a hand-drawn map to a cemetery plot.

#### Photographs

- 2 1 Berle, Milton, Undated
- 2 2 Brown, Joe E., Undated
- 3 3 Byrne, Brendan, Undated  
New Jersey Governor
- 4 4 Dale, Charlie and Smith, Joe, 1931-1969; Undated
- 5 5 Dale, Charlie; Smith, Joe and Others, 1916-1963; Undated  
Includes photographs with Julie Newmar and Cardinal Francis Spellman
- 6 6 Dale, Charlie and Others, Undated
- 7 7 Humphrey, Hubert, 1977  
With Irv Welzer
- 8 8 Moore, Archie, 1955
- 9 9 Smith, Joe, 1913-1970; Undated  
Smith, Joe and Others
- 10 10 Albertson, Jack, 1973; Undated
- 11 11 Berle, Milton, Undated  
Includes photographs of the two with Joey Adams and Irv Welzer
- 12 12 Byrne, Brendan, 1978  
New Jersey Governor; Both photographs personalized and signed by Byrne
- 13 13 Foreman, George, 1977  
With Irv Welzer
- 14 14 Foster, Phil and King, Alan, 1975
- 15 15 Franklin, Joe, Undated
- 16 16 Jacobson, Irving, Undated  
In Jacobson's dressing room after a performance of *Man of La Mancha*
- 17 17 Jessel, George, undated  
With Irv Welzer
- 18 18 Louis, Joe, 1977

- With Irv Welzer
- 19 Peters, Bernadette, Undated
- 20 Reynolds, Debbie, 1973
- 21 Sales, Soupy, Undated
- 22 Unidentified, 1913-1980; Undated
- 23 Unidentified, 1915-1968; Undated
- 24 Negatives, Undated
- 25 Photocopies, Undated
- 26 Programs, 1946-1977
  - Includes a program for *The Sunshine Boys* signed and personalized by Jose Ferrer and Phil Leeds
- 27 Publicity, Undated
  - Includes liner notes, fliers and introductions
- 28 Religious Items, 1967; 1976; Undated
  - Jewish prayers and Christian prayer cards, including one in memory of Mrs. Smith
- 29 Scrapbook--The Avon Comedy Four, Undated
  - Vaudeville act starring Smith and Dale
- Writings
  - Smith, Joe
  - 30 Dial-a-Joke, c.1970s
    - Scripts for one-minute adaptations of *Dr. Kronkhite* sketch performed by Smith on the Dial-a-Joke telephone line
  - 31 Notes for Speeches, Undated
  - 32 Poetry, 1962-1963; Undated
  - 33 Sketches, 1973; 1977; Undated
    - Includes published transcript of *Dr. Kronkhite Revisited* and many handwritten scripts
  - 34 Others, Undated
    - Copies of poems and prose by other people
- Oversized
  - 3 1 Awards and Certificates, 1942-1978
  - 2 Drawings, 1941-1975; Undated
    - Drawings and Caricatures of Smith and Dale
  - 3 Photographs, 1929; Undated
    - Smith and Dale; The Avon Comedy Four
  - Scores
    - 4 Beadell, Eily and Tollerton, Nell--*Cruising Down the River*, Undated
      - Lead sheet, handwritten in pen
    - 5 Carrol, Harry and Dillon, Will--*You Keep Your Eye On Me and I'll Keep My Eye On You*, 1912
      - Sheet music
    - 6 Edwards, Leo; Clarke, Grant and Rogers, Howard E.--*Just For Me and Mary*, Undated
      - Lead Sheet
    - 7 Edwards, Leo and Kramer, Les--*We Are the Forgotten Men of the Avon Comedy Four*, Undated
      - Piano-vocal score
    - 8 Hillebrand, Fred--*May the Wind Always Be At Your Back, Laddie*, 1949
      - Lead Sheet
    - 9 Hillebrand, Fred--*This is the AgVariety Show*, Undated
      - Lyrics only
    - 10 Levey, Harold; Bratton, John and O'Hara, Geoffrey--*America--Love It or Leave It*, 1941

- Published piano-vocal score
- 11 O'Hara, Geoffrey and Smith, Joe--*On the Straight and Narrow Road*, 1959  
Piano-vocal score
- 12 Violinsky and Johnson, Howard--*Honolulu Eyes* from *The Passing Show of 1919*, 1921  
Sheet Music
- 13 Wenrich, Percy and Mahoney, Jack--*Come Back, Dixie*, 1915  
Sheet music
- 14 Woods, Harry and Dixon, Mort--*I'm Looking Over a Four-Leaf Clover*, Undated  
Lead sheet
- 15 Zero, Jack--*Hey, Kesideetch*, 1950  
Lead sheet
- 16 Various—Medley, Undated  
Jaffe, Moe; Fulton, Jack and Bonx, Nat--*If You Are But A Dream*;  
Austin, Ray and Worth, Bobby--*I Look at Heaven*;  
Carrol, Harry and McCarthy, Joseph--*I'm Always Chasing Rainbows*  
Lead sheet