



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Harry Hershfield collection

1896-1979

*T-Mss 1979-004

Summary

Creator: Hershfield, Harry, 1885-1974

Title: Harry Hershfield collection

Date: 1896-1979

Size: 7.13 linear feet (20 boxes, 1 oversize folder)

Source: Donated by Morris P. Arnoff, 1979.

Revision History: Eight boxes processed by Emily P. Dunne in

Abstract: Harry Hershfield (1885-1974) was an American cartoonist, humorist, and radio personality. The Harry Hershfield collection, dating from 1896 to 1979, documents his career and contains photographs, writings, letters, programs, scrapbooks, clippings, awards, certificates and a framed portrait.

Preferred citation: Harry Hershfield collection, *T-Mss 1979-004. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Joyce Joseph, 2015. Finding aid updated to reflect changes in the container list by Joyce Joseph, 2016.

Creator History

Harry Hershfield was an American cartoonist, humorist, and radio personality. He was born in 1885 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and was married to Sarah Jane Isdell. In the 1940s, Hershfield worked as a panelist on radio programs such as *Stop Me If You've Heard This One* and *Can You Top This?* Hershfield also made frequent appearances on television programs during the 1950s.

Hershfield entertained as toastmaster or master of ceremonies at countless banquets, dinners, and stage benefits throughout his career. He was a member of the charitable organization Circus Saints and Sinners Club of America, and the theatrical social club The Lambs. He died in 1974 in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The Harry Hershfield collection dates from 1896 to 1979 and contains materials related to his career as a cartoonist, humorist, radio host, and banquet toastmaster.

The collection contains examples of Hershfield's original humor writing, including a list of punch lines, joke setlists for banquets, short stories including "Barbara of Seville" and "Market Value," radio scripts such as *Life is Funny with Harry Hershfield*, and some original comic strips.

Ephemera from the Circus Saints and Sinners Club and The Lambs Club is featured throughout the collection, including newsletters, flyers, and programs. There are programs from events at which Hershfield entertained or was honored, as well as letters of appreciation for his appearances and participation.

Also included is a large framed oil on canvas portrait painting by the artist David Immerman of Hershfield with a bust of Mark Twain. The painting is dated March 8, 1964, and bears a plaque reading "Harry Hershfield / contemplating the bust of Mark Twain / Presentation by the Honorable Robert F. Wagner / Mayor of the City of New York, May 6, 1965."

A significant part of the collection consists of photographs from various events at which Hershfield was an honoree, toastmaster, or master of ceremonies. Many event photographs are grouped by subject, including political and sports figures. Hershfield was very involved in local New York City politics and was often photographed with former mayor Robert Wagner. Hershfield was also interested in boxing and baseball and hosted many events honoring athletes. The photographs of events at the Circus Saints and Sinners Club provide a significant glimpse into the intersection of Hershfield's interest in humor, politics and sports, with Hershfield hosting many events honoring a prominent political or sports figure. The collection also includes photographs from the radio program *Can You Top This?* and personal images of his family and early life in Iowa.

The collection includes several scrapbooks, including one created by the Joseph Warren Masonic Lodge, No. 933, highlighting milestones from Hershfield's life. Another scrapbook contains ephemera and photographs from May 17th 1955, when Mayor Wagner honored Hershfield by declaring that the day was "Mr. New York Day," and Hershfield as "Mr. New York."

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically by format or subject.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

- Albums (books)
- Certificates
- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Negatives (photographs)
- Photographs
- Programs

Occupations

- Cartoonists.
- Humorists.

Subjects

Humorous stories

Masters of ceremonies

Radio comedies

Names

Hershfield, Harry, 1885-1974

Wagner, Robert F. (Robert Ferdinand), 1910-1991

Circus Saints & Sinners Club of America

Lambs (New York, N.Y.)

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Autographs 1930s-1960s
 - Award 1955
 - Located in the *T-Cabinet. To view, email theatre@nypl.org to make an appointment.
- b. 1 f. 2 Certificates 1942-1974
 - b. 11 f. 1
 - b. 12 f. 1
 - b. 16 f. 1
 - b. 18 f. 1
 - b. 19 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 3 o. 1 Circus Saints and Sinners Club of America 1943-1960s
- b. 1 f. 4-7 Clippings 1930-1971
 - b. 11 f. 2
- Humor Writing
 - b. 11 f. 3 1930s-1952
 - b. 1 f. 8 Comic Strips 1912-1930s
 - b. 1 f. 9-10 Joke Setlists 1930s-1960s
 - b. 2 f. 1
 - b. 2 f. 2-3 *Life is Funny with Harry Hershfield* 1943
 - b. 2 f. 4 Punch Lines 1930s-1960s
 - b. 2 f. 5-7 Short Stories 1929-1960s
 - b. 2 f. 8-9 The Lambs 1944-1970
- b. 19 f. 2 o. 1
 - b. 3 f. 1-8 Letters 1925-1974
 - b. 12 f. 2
 - b. 15
- Oil Painting 1965
 - Located in the Treasures Room. To view, email theatre@nypl.org to make an appointment.
- Photographs
 - b. 11 f. 4 Family Photos 1896-1960s
 - b. 4 f. 1-7 1900s-1960s
 - Family photos in folders 2 through 5.
 - b. 5-8 1930s-1970s
- b. 12 f. 3-4 Awards and Special Events
 - b. 12 f. 4-5 1930s-1970s
 - b. 16 f. 2
 - b. 18 f. 2-3
 - b. 19 f. 3
 - b. 9 f. 1-5 *Can You Top This?* 1940s-1950s
 - b. 12 f. 6 Fire Department Parade 1950s-1960s
 - b. 9 f. 6 The Lambs 1950s-1960s
 - b. 12 f. 7 New York Cardiac Center 1960s
 - b. 16 f. 4
- b. 13 f. 1-2 Circus Saints and Sinners 1950s-1960s
- Political Figures
 - b. 13 f. 3-4 1930s-1970s
 - b. 16 f. 3-4
 - b. 18 f. 4

Photographs (cont.)

Political Figures (cont.)

- b. 13 f. 5 Army, Navy, Airforce 1930s-1970s
- b. 13 f. 6 Mayor Robert Wagner 1950s-1960s
- b. 16 f. 4
- b. 14 f. 1 New York City Administration 1930s-1970s

Sports Figures

- b. 14 f. 2 Baseball 1930s-1970s
- b. 14 f. 3 Boxing 1930s-1970s
- b. 16 f. 4
- b. 14 f. 4 Personal 1930s-1970s
- b. 16 f. 4
- b. 14 f. 5 Portraits 1902-1970s
- b. 16 f. 4
- b. 9 f. 7-10 Programs 1929-1979
- b. 11 f. 1

Scrapbooks

- b. 10 1928-1971
- b. 11 f. 3 1945-1964
- b. 1 1963
- b. 14 f. 7 Mr. New York 1955 May 17
- b. 17
- b. 14 f. 6 Circus Saints and Sinners 1950s-1970s