Summary

Creator: RKO Radio Pictures

Title: RKO Radio Pictures, inc. correspondence

Date: 1931-1958

Source: The RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. correspondence was purchased by the Billy Rose Theatre Division in June, 1996 from Charles Apfelbaum.

Abstract: Highlighting the careers of actors, writers, and directors, the letters, memos, loan agreements, and contractual information for various film projects span the years 1931-1958. This collection of correspondence from the RKO legal department is about the studio's famous employees and not from them. Items of interest include copies of Katharine Hepburn's 1932 agreement with RKO and her buy-out in 1938, an issue of the Tim Holt magazine introducing the Ghost Rider [1949], and aspects of Charles Laughton's career including THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. The folder regarding the production and distribution of the motion picture CORNERED contains, besides correspondence, a budget estimate, synopses, music cue sheets, and the billing sheet for screen and advertising credits.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in the NYPL's online catalog for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials

Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

Conditions Governing Use: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Processing note: Processed by Susan McArthur.

Creator History

The Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation (RKO) began in the late 1920's with a merger between the Film Booking Office of America and the Keith-Albee-Orpheum theater chain. Three years later, with the takeover of American Pathe, a major Hollywood production and distribution studio was born. Over the years, production chiefs included David O. Selznick, Merian C. Cooper, George Schaefer, and Dore Schary. Among the memorable motion pictures produced by and/or released through RKO were the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, early Katharine Hepburn films, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, King Kong, Alfred Hitchcock's Suspicion and Notorious, and Orson Welles' Citizen Kane. RKO began its decline when Howard Hughes bought a controlling interest in 1948. In 1955 Hughes sold the company to the General Teleradio Corporation who, in turn, sold the television rights to over seven hundred films. The studio property was purchased by Desilu Productions in 1958.

Scope and Content Note

Highlighting the careers of actors, writers, and directors are letters, memos, loan agreements, and contractual information for various film projects. It should be noted that this collection of correspondence from the RKO legal department is about the studio's famous employees and not from them. Items of interest include copies of Katharine Hepburn's 1932 agreement with RKO and her buy-out in 1938, an issue of the Tim Holt magazine introducing the Ghost Rider [1949], and aspects of Charles Laughton's career including The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

The folder regarding the production and distribution of the motion picture Cornered contains, besides correspondence, a budget estimate, synopses, music cue sheets, and the billing sheet for screen and advertising credits.

Arrangement: Alphabetical

Key Terms

Titles
Cornered (Motion picture)
Hunchback of Notre Dame (Motion picture : 1939)

Subjects
Motion picture actors and actresses
Motion picture studios -- United States
Motion pictures -- Production and direction
Motion pictures -- United States -- History

Names
RKO Radio Pictures
Henreid, Paul
Hepburn, Katharine, 1907-2003
Hitchcock, Alfred, 1899-1980
Holt, Tim, 1918-1973
Laughton, Charles, 1899-1962
Runyon, Damon, 1880-1946
Shaw, Irwin, 1913-1984
Sinatra, Frank, 1915-1998
Container List

b. 1 f. 1 John Barrymore, 1952 (1 folder.)
Contract between RKO Radio Pictures and John Barrymore, Jr. Since he was a minor at the time, it is signed by his mother Dolores Costello Barrymore.

b. 1 f. 2 Cornered (Motion picture: 1945), 1931-1958 (1 folder.)
Correspondence [1931, 1944-1958, budget estimate, title registration report, music cue sheets, and other materials related to the 1945 motion picture Cornered. Included is a synopsis of the original story by Ben Hecht, Herman Mankiewicz, and Czenzi Ormonde.

b. 1 f. 3 Davis, Bette, 1956 (1 folder.)
Payment on demand (Motion picture)Davis, Bette. 1908-1989
One letter re: Bette Davis and the motion picture Payment on Demand.

b. 1 f. 4 Fonda, Henry, 1946 (1 folder.)
Fonda, Henry, 1905-1982
Page one of a letter of agreement between Henry Fonda and RKO.

b. 1 f. 5 Fontaine, Joan, 1945 (1 folder.)
Fontaine, Joan, 1917-2013
Memo re: loan agreement with the Selznick Studio for Joan Fontaine.

b. 1 f. 6 Henreid, Paul, 1941-1946 (1 folder.)
Now, voyager (Motion picture)Henreid, Paul
Correspondence re: Paul Henreid includes RKO's efforts to obtain an enemy alien travel permit for Henreid in 1942 and his contract for the motion picture Now, Voyager.

b. 1 f. 7 Hepburn, Katharine, 1932-1938 (1 folder)
Hepburn, Katharine, 1909-
Katharine Hepburn's 1932 agreement with RKO Studios, subsequent amendments, and 1938 termination.

b. 1 f. 8 Hilton, James, 1941-1947 (1 folder)
Hilton, James, 1900-1954

b. 1 f. 9 Hitchcock, Alfred, 1940-1946 (1 folder)
Notorious (Motion picture)Hitchcock, Alfred, 1899-1980
Correspondence re: Alfred Hitchcock film projects including Notorious.

b. 1 f. 10 Holden, William, 1947 (1 folder.)
Rachel and the stranger (Motion picture)Holden, William, 1918-1981
Correspondence re: William Holden and his role in the motion picture Rachel and the Stranger.

b. 1 f. 11 Holt, Tim, 1938-1956 (1 folder.)
My darling Clementine (Motion picture)The treasure of the Sierra Madre (Motion picture)Holt, Tim, 1918-1973
Correspondence and letters of agreement re: the career of Tim Holt. Included is information about the publication of a series of Tim Holt western stories.

b. 1 f. 12 Magazine / Tim Holt, 1949 (1 folder.)
Comic books
The 1949 Tim Holt western magazine [comic book] which introduces the Ghost Rider character.

b. 1 f. 13 Laughton, Charles, 1939-1943 (1 folder.)
The hunchback of Notre Dame (Motion picture: 1939)Laughton, Charles, 1899-1962
The correspondence re: the career of Charles Laughton is mainly about The Hunchback of Notre Dame and his tax liability.

b. 1 f. 14 Runyon, Damon, 1941-1949 (1 folder)
Runyon, Damon, 1880-1946

b. 1 f. 15 Shaw, Irwin 1936-1941 (1 folder)
Shaw, Irwin, 1913-1984
Correspondence re: Irwin Shaw as a motion picture writer and adapter.
b. 1 f. 16  Sinatra Music Publishing, 1943-1948 (1 folder)
The miracle of the bells (Motion picture)The kissing bandit (Motion picture) It happened in
Correspondence and contracts re: the career of Frank Sinatra and the Sinatra Music Publishing
Corporation.

b. 1 f. 17  Sinatra Music Publishing, 1949-1955 (1 folder)
Correspondence re: the Sinatra Music Publishing Corporation. Includes the RKO Radio Pictures

b. 1 f. 18  Unidentified contract. (1 folder)

b. 1 f. 19  Legal papers / Nicholas J. Curtis, 1954 (1 folder.)
Pages from a lawsuit involving Nicholas J. Curtis and a copyright issue. Includes a list of motion
pictures from the files of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.