



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Reminiscences of Nate Salsbury**

1899-1943

\*T-Mss 1961-005

## Summary

**Creator:** Salsbury, Nathan, 1846-1902

**Title:** Reminiscences of Nate Salsbury

**Date:** 1899-1943

**Size:** .21 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift, James, Rebecca Salsbury

**Abstract:** Nathan "Nate" Salsbury (1846-1902) was producer and manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, a highly successful show business enterprise that toured the United States, Europe, and elsewhere from the 1880s well into the 20th century, and featured William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Born in Illinois in 1846, Nathan Salsbury entered the U. S. Army while still in his teens, first as a drummer boy and eventually as a soldier with the 89th Illinois Regiment of Infantry, fighting in Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas. After the war, he became an actor in various stock companies, appeared for a time with his own troupe, Salsbury's Troubadours, then retired from performing in 1887. Meanwhile, in 1883, Salsbury had been a key figure in the launch of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, an outdoor extravaganza that dramatized frontier life, built around the personality of onetime soldier, scout and hunter William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody (1846-1917). The show, which also starred sharpshooter Annie Oakley and, for one season, Chief Sitting Bull, was a worldwide success for many years, outlasting its producer and manager Nate Salsbury, who died on Christmas Eve of 1902, at the age of 56. His daughter Rebecca Salsbury James (1891-1968) was an artist who lived for most of her life in Taos, New Mexico. Consists of a typescript of Nate Salsbury's reminiscences, much of which concerns his Civil War experiences, his life as a touring actor, and, briefly, his years with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. In addition to Salsbury's memoir, there are four folders of correspondence, mostly written to Rebecca Salsbury, although there is one telegram to Cody and Salsbury from actor Henry Irving. There is one letter dated 1917 to Rebecca's brother Milton Salsbury from actor James O'Neill, and a number of condolence letters to Rebecca upon Milton's death in August 1927, including one from James' son, playwright Eugene O'Neill. There is also a two-page account, written in 1943 by Wild West Show factotum Harry Tarleton, of a musical production Nate Salsbury mounted around 1895 called Black America, which featured an all African-American cast, and toured several cities in the U.S. before it disbanded.

**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>

**Preferred citation:** Reminiscences of Nate Salsbury, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

### **Creator History**

Nathan "Nate" Salsbury (1846-1902) was producer and manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, a highly successful show business enterprise that toured the United States, Europe, and elsewhere from the 1880s well into the 20th century, and featured William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Born in Illinois in 1846, Nathan Salsbury entered the U. S. Army while still in his teens, first as a drummer boy and eventually as a soldier with the 89th Illinois Regiment of Infantry, fighting in Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas. After the war, he became an actor in various stock companies, appeared for a time with his own troupe, Salsbury's Troubadours, then retired from performing in 1887. Meanwhile, in 1883, Salsbury had been a key figure in the launch of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, an outdoor extravaganza that dramatized frontier life, built around the personality of onetime soldier, scout and hunter William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody (1846-1917). The show, which also starred sharpshooter Annie Oakley and, for one season, Chief Sitting Bull, was a worldwide success for many years, outlasting its producer and manager Nate Salsbury, who died on Christmas Eve of 1902, at the age of 56. His daughter Rebecca Salsbury James (1891-1968) was an artist who lived for most of her life in Taos, New Mexico.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Consists of a typescript of Nate Salsbury's reminiscences, much of which concerns his Civil War experiences, his life as a touring actor, and, briefly, his years with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. In addition to Salsbury's memoir, there are four folders of correspondence, mostly written to Rebecca Salsbury, although there is one telegram to Cody and Salsbury from actor Henry Irving. There is one letter dated 1917 to Rebecca's brother Milton Salsbury from actor James O'Neill, and a number of condolence letters to Rebecca upon Milton's death in August 1927, including one from James' son, playwright Eugene O'Neill. There is also a two-page account, written in 1943 by Wild West Show factotum Harry Tarleton, of a musical production Nate Salsbury mounted around 1895 called Black America, which featured an all African-American cast, and toured several cities in the U.S. before it disbanded.

### **Key Terms**

#### **Subjects**

Actors -- United States  
Performing arts -- United States  
Theater -- United States -- History -- 19th century  
Wild west shows -- United States

#### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Correspondence  
Typescripts

**Geographic Names**

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

**Names**

Salsbury, Nathan, 1846-1902

Buffalo Bill, 1846-1917

James, Rebecca Salsbury, 1891-1968

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

Salsbury's Troubadours