



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Aaron Hoffman papers

1900s-1926

*T-Mss 2007-023

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013

Summary

Creator: Hoffman, Aaron, 1880-1924

Title: Aaron Hoffman papers

Date: 1900s-1926

Size: 13.86 linear feet (33 boxes)

Source: Donated by Bartfam, A California Limited Partnership, 2007.

Abstract: Aaron Hoffman (1880-1924) was a playwright, best known as a writer for vaudeville. The Aaron Hoffman papers (1900s-1926) contain scripts, synopses, notes, and background material for Hoffman's plays, vaudeville acts, and films. The papers also hold a small number of scripts written by other authors.

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Processing note: Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013 Materials were removed from manila envelopes and plastic sleeves. The collection was kept in the order in which it was received.

Creator History

Aaron Hoffman was a playwright, best known as a writer for vaudeville. Born in 1880, Hoffman moved to New York City at the age of 21 and, within a few years, established himself as a writer for musical comedies and vaudeville. His work was in wide use among vaudeville performers through the 1920s. One of his best-known sketches was "The Cherry Tree," written for Harry Green, which remained popular for over a decade. Hoffman also wrote for film, and between 1915 and 1917 was engaged to write scenarios for films featuring British-American actor Olga Petrova. In 1918, his play *Friendly Enemies*, co-written with Samuel Shipman, became his first non-musical work to be produced on Broadway. He died in New York City in 1924.

Scope and Content Note

The Aaron Hoffman papers (1900s-1926) document the creation of Hoffman's plays, vaudeville acts, and films. The papers also hold a small number of scripts written by other writers. An inventory spreadsheet created by the donor, detailing the contents of the collection and their condition, is available, and is referred to as Hoffman Collection Spreadsheet under Additional Resources. The materials in the collection were previously assigned file numbers, possibly by Hoffman. These numbers are listed in the spreadsheet as well as written on the materials.

Play and vaudeville act files hold scripts, notes, synopses, and clippings that Hoffman used as inspiration for his scripts. The files chiefly date from the 1900s to 1924, though they include a few copies of scripts from 1926, after Hoffman's death. The files contain multiple versions of many of the scripts, including clean copies, annotated drafts, prompt books, and versions created for local performances. Sometimes revised versions of the scripts are filed under different titles. Over 50 plays are represented in the play files, including *The Belle of Avenue A* (1905), *Friendly Enemies* (1918), *Nothing But Lies* (1918), and *Welcome Stranger* (1920). Vaudeville scripts consist of monologues, sketches, and one-act plays. The scripts were written for vaudeville performers such as Lew Dockstader, Senator Francis Murphy, Sam Mann, Henry Lewis, the Klein Brothers, Joe Welch, and Nora Bayes. Subjects include prohibition, women's suffrage, and World War I. Scripts that have two or more acts are held in the play files, even in cases where they were written for vaudeville or comedy performers. For example, some scripts written for the Behman Show are held in the play files.

Film files date from about 1914 to 1917. Film files contain scenarios, screenplays, and notes.

Miscellaneous records include pages and related material from unidentified and incomplete scripts. Also present are Hoffman's "idea books" for plays, vaudeville acts, and film. The idea books contain scenes, notes, potential titles, and newspaper and magazine clippings that Hoffman used as sources of ideas. Other miscellaneous records consist of Hoffman's critiques of German plays, published synopses of Hoffman's films and plays, and synopses and play titles from the Samuel French catalog.

The collection also holds plays, sketches, screenplays, and film scenarios by other writers. These writers include George V. Hobart, John B. Hymer, De Witte Kaplan, and Jo Swerling. Some of these scripts have notes and revisions by Hoffman.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in five categories: films, miscellaneous writings and notes, plays, vaudeville acts, and scripts by other writers. The files are mostly alphabetized by title, though in some instances they are alphabetized by performer or by concept (e.g. "dog story" and "parody medley"). Untitled vaudeville acts are listed at the end of the vaudeville files. A detailed inventory spreadsheet, describing the items and their condition in more detail, is available, and is referred to as Hoffman Collection Spreadsheet under Additional Resources. In a few instances, the inventory incorrectly attributes plays to Hoffman. The misattributed plays are listed individually under "Scripts by Other Writers" in the container list.

Key Terms

Occupations

Dramatists

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Scenarios (outlines)
Scripts

Subjects
Vaudeville

Container List

Films

- b. 31 f. 8-12 Bluff - Extravagance 1915-1917
- b. 32 f. 1-12 Great - Overcoat 1910s
- b. 33 f. 1-11 Peach - Woman's 1910s

Miscellaneous Writings and Notes

- b. 31 f. 3 Critiques of German Plays 1913
- b. 30 f. 5-12 Idea Books 1910s, 1922
- b. 31 f. 1-2 Idea Books 1910s
- b. 31 f. 4-7 Synopses and Titles of Films and Plays 1915-1920
- b. 29 f. 7-10 Untitled and Unidentified Script Pages 1910s-1920s
- b. 30 f. 1-4 Untitled and Unidentified Script Pages 1910s-1920s

Plays

- b. 1 f. 1-8 \$100,000 - Be 1903-1923
- b. 2 f. 1-11 Behman - End 1900s-1926
- b. 3 f. 1-8 Family - Gay 1910-1919
- b. 4 f. 1-9 Gay - Girls 1912-1914
- b. 5 f. 1-9 Girls - Give 1914, 1922
- b. 6 f. 1-9 Give and Take 1922
- b. 7 f. 1-10 Give - King 1905-1923
- b. 8 f. 2-10 Let - Light 1912, 1923
- b. 9 f. 1-10 Little 1913-1914, 1918
- b. 10 f. 1-11 Little - No 1900s-1924
- b. 11 f. 1-8 Nothing But Lies 1918
- b. 12 f. 1-10 Nothing - Politics 1907-1926
- b. 13 f. 1-8 Prettiest - Two 1909-1923
- b. 14 f. 1-2 Two Blocks Away 1921
- b. 14 f. 5-10 Up - Welcome 1900s, 1920, 1923
- b. 15 f. 1-6 Welcome - Young 1909, 1920

Scripts by Other Writers

- b. 28 f. 1-15 Baby - Man 1900s-1920s
- b. 29 f. 1-10 Man - Spell 1910s-1920s
 - b. 7 f. 11 La Dame du Commissaire
 - b. 8 f. 1 La Marmotte
 - b. 14 f. 3 Two Little Girls
 - b. 14 f. 4 The Typewriter Girl 1909

Vaudeville Acts

- b. 15 f. 7-8 Added - Aeronaut 1906, 1920
- b. 16 f. 1-23 Air - Cheerful 1900s-1920s
- b. 17 f. 1-20 Cherry - For 1907-1919

Vaudeville Acts (cont.)

- b. 18 f. 1-15 Fox - He 1900s-1923
- b. 19 f. 1-15 Headliners - Johnny 1904-1924
- b. 20 f. 1-15 Keith's - Manna 1900s-1919
- b. 21 f. 1-16 Manna - My 1900s-1924
- b. 22 f. 1-14 New - People's 1910-1918
- b. 23 f. 1-12 Phonograph - Sayinks 1912-1924
- b. 24 f. 1-15 Shine - Speaker 1907-1910s
- b. 25 f. 1-11 Speaker - Straight 1910s-1922
- b. 26 f. 1-16 Talking - Vaudeville 1913-1922
- b. 27 f. 1-9 Water - William 1900s-1916
- b. 27 f. 10-20 Untitled Acts 1913-1917