



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**RKO Radio Pictures, inc. correspondence**

1931-1958

\*T-Mss 1996-018

Processed by Susan McArthur.

## 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.

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**Preferred citation:** RKO Radio Pictures Correspondence, \*T-Mss 1996-018, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**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  
Brooklyn (Motion picture)Sinatra, Frank, 1915-1998Sinatra Music Publishing Corporation  
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)**  
Sinatra, Frank, 1915-1998Sinatra Music Publishing Corporation  
Correspondence re: the Sinatra Music Publishing Corporation. Includes the RKO Radio Pictures  
Release Schedule for 1950.
- 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.