



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the  
**Houdiniana**  
1898-1989  
\*T-Mss 2016-010

## Summary

**Title:** Houdiniana

**Date:** 1898-1989

**Size:** 1.25 linear feet (2 boxes, 3 oversize folders, and one framed item)

**Source:** Materials were collected by the New York Public Library from various sources through purchase and gift. Materials related to Dr. Daniel E. Cohn were the gift of Shirley Cohn, July 2022.

**Revision History:** Re-structured the finding aid to separate correspondence and clippings/ephemera into separate series. Renumbered following series accordingly. Added Shirley Cohn gift materials to Series 1 and a re-classed oversized photograph (with new container) to Series 4. Also added new folder-level descriptions to legacy materials in Series 1 and 2.

**Abstract:** Collection includes correspondence, ephemera, programs, police certificates, photographs, posters, and clippings related to the life and legacy of magician and escape artist Harry Houdini (1874-1926).

**Preferred citation:** Houdiniana, \*T-Mss 2016-010. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Language of the Material:** English

### Related Materials:

See also related collections: Dr. Saram Ellison scrapbooks (\*T-Mss 1915-001); Magic scrapbooks (\*T-Mss 2011-031); and Houdini artwork (\*T-Vim 2011-293).

## Scope and Content Note

Collection includes correspondence, clippings, ephemera, programs, police certificates, photographs, and posters related to the life and legacy of magician and escape artist Harry Houdini (1874-1926). Of particular note are several manuscript letters by Houdini to various colleagues, documentation about Houdini's death, and also a large group of "police certificates" that describe and attest to Houdini's

escapes in front of groups of police, civic leaders, and journalists across the United States and Western Europe.

**Arrangement:** The collection is organized into four series: I) Correspondence, Clippings and Ephemera; II) Police Certificates; III) Photographs; IV) Posters.

## **Key Terms**

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings (information artifacts)

Correspondence

Photographic prints

Posters

Printed ephemera

Programs (documents)

### **Subjects**

Escape artists

Magic

Magic tricks

Magicians

### **Names**

Cohn, Daniel E., Dr.

Houdini, Harry, 1874-1926

Peterkin, Walter

Ernst, Fox & Cane

## Container List

### Series I: Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1     **Correspondence from Houdini to Walter G. Peterkin 1900**  
Two holograph letters on letterhead. First letter written from Berlin, Nov. 10, 1900, references Houdini's recent activities and also Herrmann, Anna Eva Fay, Dr. Slade, and William Elsworth Robinson aka Chung Ling Soo.
- b. 1 f. 2     **Letter from Prince Friedrich Leopold of Prussia to Houdini Oct. 10 1908**  
Holograph letter, signed, with 4 translations attached, thanking Houdini for his performance on October 9th in the Castle of Klein-Glienecke and sending him a pin as a token of recognition and gratefulness on behalf of the court.
- b. 1 f. 3     **Correspondence from Houdini to Dr. Saram R. Ellison January 24, 1918**  
Typed letter, signed, thanking Ellison for his letter and expressing appreciation of Dean [Harry] Kellar.
- b. 1 f. 4     **Correspondence from Houdini to Mr. and Mrs. Oliver R. Barrett Nov. 18, 1920**  
Holograph letter on embossed Players Club stationery describing how to do a card trick, intended for Roger Barrett, the young son of the Barretts. 3 pp. recto and verso, 8vo., with envelope postmarked from Atlantic City, New Jersey.
- b. 1 f. 5     **Dr. Daniel E. Cohn medical notes October 1926**  
Describes medical conditions over several days and the cause of death for Harry Houdini.
- b. 1 f. 6     **Correspondence from Theodore Hardeen to Dr. Daniel E. Cohn Nov. 1, 1926**
- b. 1 f. 7     **Correspondence from Ernst, Fox & Cane to Dr. Daniel E. Cohn 1926-1927**  
Regarding payments to Dr. Cohn for his medical services to Houdini and the medical causes of Houdin's death.
- b. 1 f. 8     **Correspondence from Bess Houdini to Mr. R. W. G. Vail Jan. 19, 1927**  
Typed carbon copy letter sharing "a few facts regarding the Houdini Dramatic Library."
- b. 1 f. 9     **Note regarding Carl (Compars) Herrmann, with Houdini signature undated**

### Series II: Clippings and Ephemera

- b. 1 f. 10    **Clippings 1902-1918**
- b. 1 f. 11    **Clippings 1920-1929**
- b. 1 f. 12    **Clippings 1930-1939**
- b. 1 f. 13    **Clippings 1940-1949**
- b. 1 f. 14    **Clippings 1950-1959**
- b. 1 f. 15    **Clippings 1960-1969**
- b. 1 f. 16    **Clippings 1970-1979**
- b. 1 f. 17    **Clippings 1980-1989**
- b. 1 f. 18    **Clippings undated**
- b. 1 f. 19    **Houdini calling cards circa 1900-1920, undated 1900 (2 items)**  
One calling card gives address in London. The other card is bordered in black, without address.
- b. 1 f. 20    **Harry Houdini: the adventurous life of a versatile artiste, pamphlet circa 1908-1910**
- b. 1 f. 21    **Houdini article typescript by Arthur W. Row circa 1920s**
- b. 1 f. 22    **The Harry Houdini Dramatic Library by R. W. G. Vail, typescript circa 1927**
- b. 1 f. 23    **Programs circa 1906, 1925-1926**
- b. 1 f. 24    **Miscellaneous ephemera 1924-1977**

### Series III: Police Certificates

- b. 2 f. 1     **1898**  
Locations include Chicago, Ill. and St. Joseph, Mo.

Series III: Police Certificates (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 2     1899  
Locations include Cincinnati, Ohio; Denver, Colo.; Kansas City, Mo.; Los Angeles, Calif.; Memphis, Tenn.; Nashville, Tenn.; Omaha, Neb.; San Francisco, Calif.; St. Louis, Mo.; and St. Paul, Minn.
- b. 2 f. 3     1900  
Locations include Berlin, Germany; Boston, Mass.; Chicago, Ill.; Cleveland, Ohio; Dresden, Germany; Kansas City, Mo.; Philadelphia, Penn.; Providence, R.I.; Richmond, Va.; and Toronto, Canada.
- b. 2 f. 4     1901  
Locations include the German cities of Barmen, Bremen, Dortmund, Essen, Frankfurt, Koln, Dusseldorf, and Leipzig.
- b. 2 f. 5     1902  
Locations include Essen, Germany; The Hague, Netherlands; Halifax, England; and Leeds, England.
- b. 2 f. 6     1903  
Locations include Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Dordrecht, The Netherlands; Groningen, The Netherlands; Huddersfield, England; and Moscow, Russia.
- b. 2 f. 7     1904  
Locations include the English cities and towns of Salford, South Shields, Sheffield, Liverpool, and St. Helens.
- b. 2 f. 8     1905  
Locations include Baltimore, Md.; Blackpool, England; Detroit, Mich.; New York, N.Y.; Rochester, England; and Rochester, N.Y.
- b. 2 f. 9     1906  
Locations include Allegheny, Penn.; Chicago, Ill.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Newark, N.J.; Philadelphia, Penn.; Providence, R.I.; Salem, Mass.; and Washington, D.C.
- b. 2 f. 10    1907  
Locations include Boston, Mass.[?]
- b. 2 f. 11    1912  
Location includes Trenton, N.J.

Series IV: Photographs

- b. 2 f. 17    Autographed photographs circa 1900-1920
  - o. 3     Display of posters, signs, and props to promote a performance by Harry Houdini at the Salem Theatre, Salem, Mass April 1906
  - o. 1     *Photograph by Apeda Studio.*  
Harry Houdini and Harry Kellar circa 1917-1922 (Gelatin silver print, mounted on board, 51 x 40.5 cm.)

Series V: Posters

- b. Framed    *Printed by the Cincinnati and New York: U.S. Lithographic Co. Russell-Morgan Print, #14281*  
Houdini in his latest incredible invention the double fold death defying water mystery 1911 (Color lithograph poster)
  - o. 2     *Printed by the Dangerfield Printing Company Limited, London.*  
Houdini upside down in the water torture cell 1912 (Color lithograph poster)