Jess Oppenheimer Collection

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Jess Oppenheimer Collection
Dates: 1936-1977
Collection Number: WGF-MS-091
Creator/Collector:
Extent: 3.26 GB; Electronic records only
Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048
Abstract: The Jess Oppenheimer Collection, 1936-1977, reflects his successful writing career in radio and television that spans five decades. The collection is entirely electronic having been scanned from original documents. It consists of radio scripts, comedy routines and spots, and production notes from shows such as My Favorite Husband and The Baby Snooks Show. It also contains television scripts from I Love Lucy and other projects. Additionally, there are treatments and a few unproduced pilots.
Language of Material: English
Access
Available by appointment only.
Publication Rights
The responsibility to secure copyright and publication permission rests with the researcher.
Preferred Citation
Jess Oppenheimer Collection. Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Acquisition Information
The collection was donated by Jess Oppenheimer's son, Gregg Oppenheimer, on 8/19/2012.
Biography/Administrative History
Jess Oppenheimer was born in San Francisco California on November 11, 1913 and attended Stanford University in the 1930s. During his junior year at Stanford, he discovered his love for writing for radio after visiting a San Francisco radio station. For the last two years of his college career, he spent all his spare time at the radio station writing jokes. After graduating, he relocated to Hollywood and found his first gig as a comedy writer on Fred Astaire’s radio program, The Packard Hour. He went on to become a gag writer for Jack Benny followed by an extensive writing career in comedy for radio variety programming that included The Chase and Sanborn Hour with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, The Lifebuoy Program with Al Jolson, The Gulf Stream Guild Show, The Rudy Vallee Show, and The Baby Snooks Show starring Fanny Brice. He eventually became head writer for Lucille Ball’s radio sitcom, My Favorite Husband. In 1950, after having worked with Oppenheimer, Lucille Ball insisted that he head up a new television project for CBS, which Jess Oppenheimer decided to call I Love Lucy. He wrote the pilot and 153 episodes in collaboration with Madelyn Pugh Davis, Bob Carroll Jr., Bob Schiller and Bob Weiskopf. He remained as head writer and producer of I Love Lucy for five years of its six seasons. When he left he was hired to an executive position at NBC. There he produced several successful television specials. Among his awards, Jess Oppenheimer received two Emmy Awards, five Emmy nominations, a Writers Guild of America Paddy Chayefsky Laurel Award for Television. He also held 18 patents for a variety of devices including the early in-the-lens teleprompter. Jess Oppenheimer died of heart failure in Los Angeles California on December 27, 1988 at the age of 75. He was survived by his wife Estelle, his son, Gregg, and his daughter Jo.
Scope and Content of Collection
The materials are all electronic PDF-formatted scripts arranged in two series: Series I: Radio (1937-1951) and Series II: Television (1951-1977). Series I: Radio scripts cover many titles that Oppenheimer wrote and produced including The Baby Snooks Show, Chase and Sanborn, Fibber McGee and Molly, My Favorite Husband- which starred Lucille Ball, Packard Hour Starring Fred Astaire, The Jack Benny Program, Rudy Vallee Show, Screen Guild Theater, and Texaco Star Theatre. TV scripts consist of every episode of seasons 1-5 of I Love Lucy as well as series Angel (1960-1961). Also included are a few unaired pilots: The Jacksons starring Joan Blondell, An Edie Adams unaired pilot, The Snooks Show which was an unsuccessful TV version of The Baby Snooks radio show. Lastly, The Ten Commandments (Third Commandment), written by Ben Hecht, was a proposed series for NBC under Jess Oppenheimer, though only a pilot aired.
Indexing Terms
Golden age of television
Teleplays
I Love Lucy
Television writers
Radio Writers