
Finding Aid to the Smokey Rogers and Maymie Anderson Papers MSA.36

Finding aid prepared by Holly Rose Larson

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Title: Smokey Rogers and Maymie Anderson Papers

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Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Autry Library

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 2.0 Linear feet(4 boxes)

Date (bulk): Bulk, 1931-1997

Date (inclusive): 1931-2003

Abstract: Singer, songwriter, and actor Eugene “Smokey” Rogers (1917-1993) was a successful and influential part of the country music scene in Southern California in the 1940s and 1950s. He performed in bands with Spade Cooley and Tex Williams, hosted his own TV show in San Diego, and co-founded the Valley Music store in El Cajon, California. His wife Maymie Anderson (1918-2001) was the first female mayor of Maywood, California. This archival collection includes photos, sheet music, recordings, and personal papers mostly spanning 1931-1997, and documents Rogers’s professional life and the personal lives of Rogers and Anderson.

creator: Anderson, Maymie

creator: Rogers, Eugene, 1917-1993

creator: Rogers, Smokey, 1917-1993

Processing history

Processing and finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Project Archivist, 2012 April 12, made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Scope and Contents

The bulk of this collection of papers and other materials spans 1931 to 1997 and documents Smokey Rogers’s entertainment career and family life with wife Maymie Anderson. Materials relating to Rogers’s career are business correspondence, financial records of royalties and appearances, movie scripts, newspaper clippings, press kits, programs, posters, publicity photographs, both published and hand-written sheet music, fan club “Smoke Signals” newsletters, songbooks, issues of Western Life magazine, and Western Caravan scripts, set lists, and production notes. Other materials include eight-track cassette tapes, 78 rpm records, a steel banjo string, and a plastic banjo head.

Family papers include correspondence, photographs, and the guest book for Rogers and Anderson’s wedding. There are also newspaper clippings on Anderson, as well as her notes and correspondence. A printout from a webpage on Tex Williams from 2003 is included.

Access

Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit <http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application> or contact library staff at room@theautry.org.

Use

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Preferred citation

Smokey Rogers and Maymie Anderson Papers, 1931-2003, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MSA.36; [folder number] [folder title][date].

Acquisition

Donation by Joseph Sherwood and Linda Kohn of High Noon Western Americana, 2007 December 17.

Biographical note

Eugene Throckmorton “Smokey” Rogers was born in McMinnville, Tennessee on 1917 March 23. His musical success began when he was only 8 years old when he won an amateur banjo contest on radio station WJR in Detroit. Five years later, when Rogers was 13, he joined the Detroit band Jack West & His Circle Star Cowboys. In 1935 at the age of 18, Rogers met and formed country music quartet Texas Jim Lewis’s Lone Star Cowboys with Larry “Pedro” DePaul, “Texas” Jim Lewis, and Andrew “Cactus” Soldi. The quartet secured a year-long gig playing at the Village Barn in New York City, and then proceeded to tour the United States. They settled in Southern California in the late 1930s and made a living performing their music in clubs and in short musical films.

Western swing was a new genre of jazz-infused country music being promoted by performers such as Spade Cooley, who hired Rogers in 1942 to perform as a guitarist, banjo player, singer, and songwriter in his band which performed regularly at the Riverside Rancho dance hall. To add to their musical show, Rogers formed a comedy trio with fellow Cooley band members Tex Williams and Deuce Spriggs. In mid-1946, Williams left Cooley's band to form his own. Williams's new band came with a contract that offered equally shared profits to all performers, so many of Cooley's band members, including Smokey Rogers, quit and went to work for Williams. Rogers still performed his comedy bits as well as his steady musical positions singing, playing guitar and banjo, and songwriting. Tex Williams named the new musical ensemble Western Caravan, and they got a regular gig at the Redondo Barn in July of 1946 and started making records with Capitol Records. The Western Caravan then moved to a converted roller rink in what is now known as Echo Park, and renamed the building the Palace Barn. During the 1950s Western swing era, Rogers's career had wild success. Rogers worked regularly in Los Angeles as a performer with Western Caravan, but also excelled in television in San Diego. In 1952, Rogers and old friends and bandmates "Pedro" DePaul and "Cactus" Soldi joined forces to open two new businesses: the Bostonia Ballroom and the Valley Music Store, blocks away from each other in El Cajon, California. DePaul dropped out fairly quickly, but Rogers and Soldi enjoyed over 20 years as successful business partners. The Bostonia Ballroom booked Western swing and country music acts, and Rogers did live television broadcasts from there. The Valley Music Store still functions under the purview of Soldi's descendents. By the time Tex Williams dissolved the Western Caravan in 1957, Rogers had already ensconced himself in his businesses in El Cajon and as an afternoon staple on television station KFMB in San Diego. Rogers started his television career purely as an entertainer but turned out to also be a keen salesman, noted for making his advertisements seem more like entertainment. Smokey Rogers was a masterful banjo player, praised for his talent and versatility. One of his most noted performances of banjo mastery appears on the song "Scale Boogie" by Western Caravan. Also a talented songwriter, he is most popular for his songs "A Little Bird Told Me," "Shame, Shame on You," "Spanish Fandango," "You Can't Break My Heart," "Tho' I Tried," "Long-Lost Love," and "Gone." Smokey worked with many famous musicians, such as Cliffie Stone and Tennessee Ernie Ford, and was associated with legendary tailor Nudie Cohn, who created one of his signature customized luxury cars for Rogers in 1975. Although Rogers was most popular in Southern California, he also performed in England, Thailand, Guam, Japan, and the Philippines, and often performed in benefit concerts sponsored by organizations like the Elks Club and local police associations. Rogers had twin sons Rex and Roy with first wife Madelene Coleman in 1951. Rogers later married Maymie Anderson in 1974. The couple divorced in 1984. Rogers died of a stroke and cancer 1993 November 23 in San Diego, California.

Biographical note

Maymie Ree Anderson had come to Southern California from Alabama with five siblings and their single mother during the Great Depression. Anderson lied to get a nighttime waitressing job at age 15 so that she could help support her family and still attend school. Anderson married her first husband, Andy Anderson, when she was only 16. They had two children together, Richard and Frances, and later adopted another child, Sandra. Together, the Andersons ran several restaurants in Maywood, California. Maywood had a tumultuous past, and crime was on the rise in the early 1960s. After a 12-year-old girl was murdered, Maymie Anderson started speaking out and was elected as the first female mayor of Maywood, California in 1964. Maymie also claimed to be the first female member of the Toastmasters International, signing up in 1967.

Maymie's term as mayor resulted in the first pension being bought for city employees, and she also doubled the police force. Maymie was constantly harassed by her opposition, but was praised for her courage and dedication by the citizens of Maywood. In 1968, Maymie's term as mayor ended, and she and Andy relocated to Apple Valley. Andy passed away in 1970, and Maymie worked in hotel gift shops and hotel management in Apple Valley. She met and married her third husband, Charles Crosby in 1995, and began a new business selling antiques. Maymie remained active in her community and was named Apple Valley's Woman of the Year in 1989. Maymie Ree Anderson Crosby passed away around 2001 February 14.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Clippings
Correspondence
Financial records
Maywood (Calif.)
Photographs
Photographs, publicity
Posters
Press kits
Sheet music

Smoke Signals Western Life
Western swing (Music)
