Finding Aid to the Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives MSA.30

Finding aid prepared by Holly Rose Larson and Marva Felchlin
Autry National Center, Autry Library
4700 Western Heritage Way
Los Angeles, CA, 90027
(323) 667-2000 ext. 349
room@theautry.org
2012 February 13
Finding Aid to the Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives MSA.30

Title: Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives
Identifier/Call Number: MSA.30
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Autry Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 28.0 Linear feet64 boxes
Date (inclusive): 1950-1994
Abstract: Nudie Cohn, born Nuta Kotlyrenko in Kiev (1902 December 15 - 1984 May 9), was a Russian immigrant who moved to America in 1913. Born into a family of boot makers and tailors, he made a name for himself in Western style tailoring. Nudie’s custom clothing was distinguished by its sharp fit and eye-catching embellishments. His work became famous in the Western music scene in the 1950s, and his client base grew over four decades to include movie studios, movie stars, rock and roll musicians, and equestrian parade participants. Nudie is famous for outfitting Roy Rogers in rhinestone-studded fringe, creating the gold lamé suit Elvis wore in 1957, and the light-up suit donned by Robert Redford in The Electric Horseman. The Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives collection spans 1950-1994 and includes customer clothing files, correspondence, boot patterns, financial records, photographs, and publications.

creator: Cohn, Nudie, 1902-1984
creator: Kotlyarenko, Nuta, 1902-1984
creator: Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors.
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 rroom@theautry.org. Customer name index is available from Library Staff.
Use
Copyright has not been assigned to the Autry National Center. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Autry Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Autry as the custodian of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.
Related Archival Materials
97.148 archival records and artifacts collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles.
Clothing and accessories collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles.
Grand Ole Opry Archives, Nashville, TN.
Arrangement
Series 1: Billing
Series 2: Boot Patterns and Boot Records
Series 3: Clippings and Correspondence
Series 4: Customer Accounts
Series 5: Customer Address and Measurement Cards
Series 6: Customer Clothing Files - Individuals
Series 7: Customer Clothing Files - Groups
Series 8: Photographs
Series 9: Publications
All series are organized alphabetically by last name of individual customer or correspondent, name of group or organization, or event or subject, as in the case of the Publications or Clippings files.
Processing History
Initial inventory, physical processing, and cataloging by Autry National Center staff. Additional processing and finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Project Archivist, 2012 February 13, made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.
Scope and contents
The Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives document the business’s activities from 1950 through the early 1990s. This archive is comprised of nine series: Billing, Boot Patterns and Boot Records, Clippings and Correspondence, Customer Accounts, Customer Address and Measurement Cards, Customer Clothing Files for Individuals, Customer Clothing Files for Groups,
Nudie Cohn (1902 December 15 - 1984 May 9) was a poor Russian immigrant who became one of the most famous and successful American Western wear designers of the twentieth century. Born Nuta Kotlyrenko to a Jewish boot maker and his wife in Kiev, Nuta was a tailor’s apprentice by age eight. At age eleven he was sent to America with his older brother to take up residence with relatives in Brooklyn, New York. At Ellis Island, his first name was misunderstood by immigration officers as “Nudie,” and the two brothers gave Cohn as their surname, to match their relatives in Brooklyn; thus Nudie Cohn was born.

Nudie tried his hand at many vocations, but the majority of his successful ventures were in tailoring. As a young man, he bounced between Los Angeles and New York City, and on one of these trips met his wife, Helen Barbara Kruger, in Minnesota. He nicknamed her “Bobbie,” and they married on 1933 September 4.

In New York City they opened Nudie’s for the Ladies, a boutique near Times Square that catered to burlesque dancers. It was here that Nudie started exploring the use of rhinestones and fanciful costumes. The couple returned to Minnesota in 1936, then moved with their two-year-old daughter Barbara to Los Angeles in 1940.

Nudie started to gain footing in Los Angeles with a dry cleaning and tailoring shop. His own designs began to bring in a lot of work, but a dishonest partner ended that venture. He then started designing and manufacturing Western style shirts for a wholesaler in North Hollywood. Again, he was met with quick success, but had to sell his part of the business after a medical emergency depleted his finances in 1947.

Although he was a talented designer and tailor, a big part of Nudie’s business success was his charisma. Tex Williams was convinced that Nudie could be successful again, and Williams sold a horse and saddle to bankroll Nudie’s next business venture, which was to outfit Tex Williams and his new band. A huge crowd came to the Riverside Rancho to see the show, and the owner of the club let Nudie display his designs there. That exposure, paired with Tex Williams raving about Nudie on the radio, brought the success that Nudie and Tex were counting on.

Both Nudie and his wife Bobbie were charismatic and enjoyed a good time. Their home and tailoring studio became a regular hang-out for Western musicians like Cliffie Stone, Spade Cooley, Hank Thompson, and Merle Travis who had suits made and often stayed on, playing their instruments with Nudie on mandolin.

In 1950, Nudie was able to move his shop out of his home and open “Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors and Western Equipment” on Victory Boulevard in North Hollywood. Nudie’s custom clothing was distinguished by its sharp fit and eye-catching embellishments. Word of mouth brought many more entertainment industry customers like Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Gene Autry, and Monte Hale. Movie and television studios hired Nudie for costume design. Customers also included equestrians requiring parade outfits and rock ‘n roll musicians. By 1954, Nudie employed 14 staffers. Nudie moved the business to a bigger shop on Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood in 1963.

This location, complete with a horse statue out front, became a landmark in the San Fernando Valley. Nudie’s workshop employed Manuel Cuevas, a top name in today’s Western couture world, shirts and pants maker Jaime Castaneda, who is still in the tailoring business in North Hollywood, and master embroiderers Viola Grae and Rose Clements.

Nudie is famous for outfitting Roy Rogers in rhinestone-studded fringe, creating the gold lamé suit Elvis wore in 1957, and the light-up suit donned by Robert Redford in The Electric Horseman. “Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors’” clientele list is impressive, boasting such stars as Rex Allen, Pee Wee King, Patsy Cline, Dolly Parton, John Wayne, John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Janis Joplin, Gram Parsons and the Flying Burrito Brothers. Nudie was also known for his cars, including a 1950 Hudson, which were embellished with steer horns and silver dollars, and for wearing mismatched boots—a nod, he says, to his impoverished childhood, when the only pair of shoes he had was mismatched hand-me-downs. Although Nudie never met with success as a musician, he also recorded and released his own album, Nudie and His Mandolin, in 1975.

Nudie retired from “Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors” in the early 1980s, but his wife Bobbie and their granddaughter Jamie kept the business running until 1995. Nudie’s creations are celebrated today by museums, collectors and fans of his clothing. Permanent exhibitions at institutions such as the Autry National Center, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, the Opryland Museum, and the Smithsonian Institution include pieces by Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors. Nudie’s designs are sought after as collector’s items and are still worn on stage by such performers as Beck.
Finding Aid to the Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives MSA.30

Acquisition
Donated by Helen B. Cohn, widow of Nudie, 1994 July 28.

Preferred citation
Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors Archives, 1950-1994, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MSA.30; [folder number] [folder title][date].

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Advertisements
Clippings
Clothing and dress measurements
Clothing trade
Commercial catalogs
Correspondence
Costume design
Costume designers -- Biography
Costume designers -- United States -- Biography
Cowboys -- Clothing
Fashion -- United States -- History -- 20th century
Fashion -- West (U.S.)
Financial records
Manufacturers catalogs
Motion picture actors and actresses -- Clothing -- United States
Photographs
Programs
Sales catalogs

Box 1-5
Scope and contents
These are the ledger book pages for individual and group customers, including contact information, purchase order details, and financial records. Some files also include correspondence and notes interfiled with the ledger sheets. Similar records can be found in Series 4: Customer Accounts.

Box 6-14, 64
Boot patterns and boot records, 1950-1985
Scope and contents
This series includes patterns for boot embellishments as well as traced outlines of the feet of customers. Some of the foot outlines are accompanied by the signatures of the customers. Customers include Gene Autry, Jackson Brown, Glen Campbell, Linda Carter, Cher, Bob Dylan, Clint Eastwood, Jerry Garcia, Billy Gibbons, Merle Haggard, Chris Hillman, Dolly Parton, Robert Redford, Ed Schafer, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Doc Severson, and Hank Williams, Jr.

Box 15-17
Clippings and correspondence, 1954-1979
Scope and contents
This series includes clippings on Nudie, his suits, his cars, his clients, and his parade appearances, photographs, and obituaries. Correspondence includes greeting cards, letters, and telegrams from friends and clients.
Arrangement
Items in this series are alphabetized by event, name of correspondent, name of format, name of publication, or topic.
Customer accounts, 1955-1985

Scope and contents
These are the ledger book pages for customers, including contact information, purchase order details, and financial records. These files sometimes also include correspondence and notes interfiled with the ledger sheets. The majority of the files are movie studio accounts. Similar records can be found in Series 1: Billing. Studio accounts in Series 4 include CBS, Columbia Pictures Corporation, Disneyland/Walt Disney Prod., KTLA TV, MGM, NBC, Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Universal Studios, Viacom, Warner Brothers, and Western Costume.

Arrangement
The Customer Accounts series is divided into two sections: Studios and Other.

Customer address and measurement cards, circa 1955-1979

Customer clothing files - Individuals, 1952-1993

Scope and contents
This series includes files for individual customers, some of whom were sent by movie studios for costuming. Materials in these files may include contact information, correspondence, ephemera, intake forms, measurements, photographs, sketches, and swatches. Some of the clients are Gene Autry, Cher and Sonny Bono, David Byrne, James Caan, Johnny Cash, Dick Clark, James Coburn, Tony Curtis, Cutter Bill, John Denver, Bob Dylan, Clint Eastwood, Chris Ethridge, Jerry Garcia, Elliot Gould, Merv Griffin, Gene Hackman, George Harrison, Chris Hillman, David Hockney, Mick Jagger, Janis Joplin, Pee Wee King, Louis L’Amour, K. D. Lang, Lash LaRue, Cloris Leachman, John Lennon, Gordon Lightfoot, Audie Murphy, Mike Nesmith, Harry Nilsson, Nick Nolte, Phil Ochs, Graham Parsons, Dolly Parton, Bill Paxton, Slim Pickens, Elvis Presley, and Robert Redford.

Customer clothing files - Groups, 1953-1992

Historical note
This series includes a file of autographs Nudie collected for a plaque he made to present to the Grand Ole Opry from stars in Hollywood. Nudie presented the plaque as a gesture from West Coast Country and Western music stars and Western film stars to the Grand Ole Opry. The presentation was made during the short-lived Grand Ole Opry television series that was sponsored by Purina in September 1956.

Scope and contents
This series includes files where clothing was ordered for a group rather than an individual. Materials in these files may include contact information, correspondence, ephemera, intake forms, measurements, photographs, sketches, and swatches. Some of the intake forms and invoices have the heading “Nudie’s Palace Barn Western Shop.” This series includes a file of autographs Nudie collected for the plaque he made to present to the Grand Ole Opry in 1956. Group customer files include parade participants such as Shriner and Sherriff mounted patrols and posses, parade bands, and Western bands like Porter Wagoner and Hank Williams, Jr.

Photographs, 1950-1975

Scope and contents
The photographs in this series depict Nudie Cohn, Bobbie Cohn, the staff of Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors and Western Equipment, the store interior, and men’s and women’s clothing and parade outfits. Other people featured in these photographs include Rex Allen, Gene Autry, Johnnie Bia Azarina, "Lex" Blythe, Sterling Blythe, Don Churchill, The Collins Family, Doreen Dare, Curley Gold, Dixie Grady, Chuck Hansen, Mike Harris and the Charmettes, Bill "Buckskin" Hale, Roy Hogsid Family, Sherry Lee, Piper Lori, Butch Miller, Gene Palmer, Roy Rogers, Wes Schorr, Sagebrush Shorty, the Sneed Family, John Sonney, Barbara Walz, Dick Wells, Curly Wiggins, and Tex Williams.
Publications, 1950-1994

Box 59-63

Arrangement


Scope and contents

This series includes advertisements, annual reports for other companies, business cards, a Hank Thompson Photo Calendar, Edward H. Bolin catalogs, comics, magazines, quarterlies, and programs. Publications include comics, Country Music magazines, JEMF Quarterly, Tex Williams' Western Life, and Western Outfitter. Programs from award ceremonies are from the Academy of Country Music, Golden Boot Awards, Motion Picture Costumers, National Finals Rodeo-L.A., and others.