José Sarria papers

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GLBT Historical Society
989 Market Street, Lower Level
San Francisco, California 94103
(415) 777-5455
reference@glbthistory.org
http://www.glbthistory.org/
2020
Descriptive Summary

Title: José Sarria papers

Dates: 1900-2013 (bulk 1960-2010)

Collection Number: 1996-01

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 2 cartons, 130 boxes, (17 oversize boxes) (65 linear feet)

Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103

Abstract: The José Sarria Papers include biographical material, correspondence, photographs, ephemera, artifacts and costumes documenting his career as an entertainer and activist in San Francisco over more than half a century.

Language of Material: English

Access
Collection is open for research. Funding for processing this collection was provided by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).

Publication Rights
Copyright to unpublished manuscript materials that José Sarria was the owner of has been transferred to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Preferred Citation
José Sarria papers. GLBT Historical Society

Acquisition Information
Gift of José Julio Sarria in February 2001 and September 2012.

Biography/Administrative History
José Julio Sarria was born December 12, 1923 at St. Francis Hospital in San Francisco. He was best known as a performer and a pioneer in the gay rights movement, most notably as the first openly gay candidate in the United States to run for public office in 1961. He was a founding member of the League for Civil Education (LCE), the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) and the Tavern Guild. Crowned Queen of the Beaux Arts Ball in 1964 by the Tavern Guild, Sarria proclaimed himself “Her Royal Majesty, Empress of San Francisco, José I, The Widow Norton” and soon thereafter established the Imperial Court System, a network of non-profit charitable organizations throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. Sarria died of adrenal cancer on August 19, 2013, at his home in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Scope and Content of Collection
The José Sarria Papers include biographical material, correspondence, photographs, ephemera, artifacts and costumes documenting his career as an entertainer and activist in San Francisco over more than half a century. The collection includes memorabilia, costumes and photos related to Sarria’s opera performances at the Black Cat Café and many other venues in the city. It contains founding papers for the League for Civil Education, the Society for Individual Rights, and the Tavern Guild, organizations Sarria helped form in the early 1960s. There is also a small amount of material related to his historic run for the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco in 1961. A major part of the collection is made up of materials relating to the history of the Imperial Court System, also known as the International Court System, which Sarria founded in 1965. The Court, one of the oldest and largest LGBT organizations in the world, raises money for charitable causes throughout North America.

Indexing Terms
Gay men
Drag
Imperial Court System
Latinx people
Nightlife
Stand-up comedy
World War, 1939-1945
Politics and elections
Imperial Court of San Francisco

Container List for the José Sarria Papers