Jay T. Last Collection of Entertainment: Schaefer's Opera House Business Correspondence: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by Charla DelaCuadra.
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.
Prints and Ephemera
The Huntington Library
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2191
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Overview of the Collection

Title: Jay T. Last collection of entertainment: Schaefer’s Opera House business correspondence

Dates (inclusive): 1867-1900

Collection Number: priJLC_ENT_Schaefer

Collector: Last, Jay T.

Extent: approximately 420 items

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Abstract: The Schaefer’s Opera House business correspondence, a subset within the Jay T. Last collection of entertainment prints and ephemera, contains records of the Schaefer’s Opera House entertainment venue of Canton, Ohio, from approximately 1867 to 1900. Approximately 420 items focus on venue contracts for various entertainment acts and productions, including commission percentages, dates, and other terms. Also included are receipts, tickets, and other ephemera.

Language: English.

Note:

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Preferred Citation

Provenance
This collection forms part of the Jay T. Last Collection of Graphic Arts and Social History, which was donated to the Huntington Library by Jay T. Last in 2005 as a gift in progress. The bulk of the entertainment ephemera was transferred to the Library between 2010 and 2013. The Schaefer’s Opera House records described in this finding aid were transferred in 2013 and 2016.

Background of the Jay T. Last Collection
The Jay T. Last Collection is an unparalleled archive of printed paper artifacts that documents American lithographic, social, and business history. The collection began in the early 1970s when physicist and Silicon Valley pioneer Jay Last moved to Southern California and started collecting citrus box labels he found at local flea markets and rummage sales. As his collection grew, Last realized that these labels conveyed important information about commercial printing, graphic design, and social history, and he expanded his collection to include other forms of American visual culture. Today this collection contains more than 200,000 lithographic prints, posters, and ephemera of mostly nineteenth and early twentieth century American origin and represents works by more than five hundred lithographic companies.

Access
Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

Background of Schaefer’s Opera House
Louis Shaefer was born December 25, 1815, in France. He was schooled there by his father (a teacher), and the family moved to Ohio in 1830, where they settled in Osnaburg Township. Shaefer worked first in a country store, then later studied law in the firm of Griswold & Grant in Canton, Ohio. He was also very involved in public affairs, serving as a member of the City Council and Board of Education, and he devoted much of his time to the local public schools. Schaefer also helped develop Canton’s water works system, and, while a county commissioner, Schaefer spearheaded a move to build a county courthouse.
Schaefer's Opera House was first opened in the season of 1867-8, and was personally managed by Schaefer for 21 years. It was the second opera house in the state, and according to contemporary accounts, the move prompted other cities to follow suit in the years following. Many acts and performances graced the stage of Schaefer's Opera house, resulting in Schaefer's acquaintance and friendship with the likes of Mary Anderson, Lawrence Barrett, Edwin Forrest, Thomas W. Keene, Margaret Mather, and Clara Morris. Other managers also held Schaefer in high regard, including John Ellsler, Brooks & Dickson, Augustus Pitou, and Shook & Collier. Through Schaefer's efforts, Canton residents enjoyed national touring productions of Hamlet, Merchant of Venice, and Uncle Tom's Cabin, as well as local productions of lesser-known plays, concerts, and touring operas.

Schaefer's Opera House was demolished shortly after Schaefer's death in 1889. It was replaced by the Canton Grand Opera House, which operated until 1945.

Scope and Content
The Schaefer's Opera House business correspondence, a subset within the Jay T. Last collection of entertainment prints and ephemera, contains records of the Schaefer's Opera House entertainment venue of Canton, Ohio, from approximately 1867 to 1890. Approximately 420 items are housed in 4 binders, and focus on venue booking agreements for various entertainment acts and productions, including commission percentages, dates, and other terms. The materials are predominantly correspondences, but ephemera such as receipts and tickets are also included.

The opera house contracts specify the percentages of gross receipts received by the show managers and the opera house for “each and every performance,” and sometimes list what each party will furnish as part of the signed agreement. That list for the house could include: a lighted, heated and cleaned theater or hall, stage men, stage furniture, ushers, bill posting and distributing, ticket sellers, and advance sales; and for the managers: the company, entertainment and perishable properties, an orchestra and conductor, door tenders, and “all printing necessary for the proper advertisement of the entertainment.”

Arrangement
The collection is arranged alphabetically by company or performer.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

Genres
Advertisements.
Business records -- United States -- 19th century.
Contracts.
Ephemera.
Letterheads.
Letters (correspondence) -- 19th century.
Printed ephemera.
Tickets.

Subjects
Schaefer, Louis, 1815-1889.
Entertainment events.
Theater -- Ohio -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Theater -- United States -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Theatrical productions.

Binder 1

Contracts, A-K by company or performer (8 x 10 inches or smaller in size)

Physical Description: approximately 90 items
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<th>Binder 2</th>
<th>Contracts, L-Z by company or performer (8 x 10 inches or smaller in size)</th>
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<td>Physical Description: approximately 105 items</td>
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<td>Binder 3</td>
<td>Correspondence and general ephemera (8 x 10 inches or smaller in size)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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