

Bob Baker collection, circa 1879-2012 (bulk 1936-2008)

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Los Angeles Public Library

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Bob Baker collection, circa 1879–2012 (bulk 1936–2008)

Dates: circa 1879–2012 (bulk 1936–2008)

Collection Number: BB_b001 – BB_b068

Creator/Collector: Baker, Bob, 1924–2014Wood, Alton, 1912–2001Bob Baker Marionette Theater.

Extent: 68 boxes (45 linear feet)

Online items available  http://photos.lapl.org/carlweb/jsp/photosearch_pageADV.jsp

Repository: Los Angeles Public Library

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Abstract: The Bob Baker collection contains photographs, negatives, slides, print materials, correspondence, ephemera, scrapbooks, photo albums and audio cassettes that relate to the life and nearly eight decade long career of Los Angeles puppeteer, Bob Baker (1924–2014), co-founder of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater. The collection documents Baker's professional activities including the performances and events that have taken place at the theater and on tour, partner Alton Wood and staff puppeteers, film and television projects, displays and exhibits, the workshop and process of creating marionettes, as well as work with Disney. Personal photographs and papers document Baker's family, his childhood, friends and colleagues, travel, and areas of Los Angeles.

Language of Material: English

Access

This collection is stored on-site at the Central Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library. It is closed for research.

Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Gift of Robert A. Baker III Trust, September 25, 2013.

Biography/Administrative History

Bob Baker (Robert Allison Baker III) was born on February 9, 1924 in Los Angeles. He discovered marionettes at the age of six when he saw his first puppet show at Barker Brothers department store downtown. He started lessons with puppeteer, Henri Gordon and began performing professionally at the age of 8. His first theater and workshop was in the garages behind his family home on New Hampshire Avenue in Koreatown, where he lived his entire life. After graduating from Hollywood High School and briefly serving in the Army Air Corps Camouflage division in WWII, he became an apprentice at George Pal's studio where he learned stop-motion animation techniques. He was promoted to lead animator of Pal's Puppetoons series within a year, but left during labor disputes. Baker went on to manufacture a commercial line of puppets that sold in department stores throughout the country and opened a studio on 7761 Santa Monica Boulevard. He created window displays and installations for department stores and local businesses and found work in film and the new medium of television. In 1949, he produced *The Adventures of Bobo*, which was the first commercial puppet show to be televised on KFI from the West Coast. That year Baker met aspiring concert pianist Alton Wood and they began the partnership of Bob Baker Productions. Wood and Baker developed theater-in-the round puppet revues, which brought the puppeteers and marionettes out into the audience. They formed the Bob Baker Marionettes touring company and performed shows at private parties, state fairs, carnivals, schools, and women's clubs throughout California. In 1963, Baker and Wood converted a 7500 square foot former movie scenery shop into the Bob Baker Marionette Theater at 1345 1st street and Glendale Blvd just west of Downtown Los Angeles. The theater served as a popular venue for Baker and Wood's elaborate puppet musical repertoires and housed a workshop for the onsite production of sets and marionettes for the shows and touring company. The theater also hosted children's birthday parties, tours and events and the Academy of Puppetry and Allied Arts, where high school students could learn the art of puppetry. Bob Baker Productions continued to create puppet for films, television series, commercials, and variety shows. During Baker's long career in the industry, some credits include Judy Garland's *A Star is Born*, Elvis Presley's *G.I. Blues*, and Disney's *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*. Baker had a long working relationship with Disney. Beginning as an animation advisor in the 1940s, he designed promotional displays for shops on Main Street at Disneyland and Disneyworld from 1968 through 1972, and produced Disney Marionette collectibles, which were sold at the theme parks. Baker also served as Governor of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences and the Academy of Television Arts and Science animation divisions, and as President of the Los Angeles Puppet Guild. Alton Wood passed away on October 9, 2001. Baker experienced financial difficulties and the theater was only able to remain open with assistance from the Ahmanson Foundation and other donors in 2008. In 2009, the theater was recognized by the Los Angeles City Council as a designated historic-cultural landmark. On November 28, 2014, Bob Baker died at the age of 90 as a result of age-related illness. The Bob Baker Marionette Theater remains the longest running permanent puppet theater in the United

States.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Bob Baker collection contains 45 linear feet of photographs, negatives, slides, print materials, correspondence, ephemera, scrapbooks, photo albums and audio cassettes that pertain to the personal life and professional activities of Bob Baker, co-founder of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater. Professional materials document Baker's nearly eight decade long career as a puppet maker and puppeteer from 1936 to 2012, including performances of puppet shows, parties and events at the Bob Baker Marionette Theater and touring road shows; partner Alton Wood, staff and colleagues; publicity, window displays, installations, exhibits, and the construction of marionettes, sets, commissioned work and commercial puppets in Baker's workshops. The collection also documents Baker's work in film and television and his work for Disney, including films, Disneyland window displays and a commercial line of collectible Disney marionettes. Personal photographs and papers document Baker's maternal and paternal family from the East Coast, Fresno, Los Angeles and Oakland; Baker's childhood, significant areas of Los Angeles, friends, colleagues, and travel.

Indexing Terms

Theater--History--20th century.

Los Angeles (Calif.)

Photographs.

Negatives.

Slides.

Photograph albums.

Ephemera.

Scrapbooks.

Audiocassettes.

Puppeteers.

Puppet makers.

Actors.

[Finding aid for the Bob Baker collection](#)
