

The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the
Smith and Dale papers, Additions

1898-1987 (bulk 1920-1978)

*T-Mss 2008-001

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, January 2012

Summary

Creator: Smith and Dale

Title: Smith and Dale papers, Additions, 1898-1987 (bulk 1920-1978)

Size: 3.86 linear feet (10 boxes)

Source: Donated by Terry McGrath, 2008.

Abstract: Joe Smith and Charlie Dale were a well-known vaudeville duo known as Smith and Dale who performed around the United States for over seventy years. The collection contains an extensive run of scripts for Smith and Dale sketches, material reflecting the later life and career of Joe Smith following Charlie Dale's death, and early material relating to their other comedy team The Avon Comedy Four.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Smith and Dale papers, Additions, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Custodial history: The papers were mostly compiled by Joe Smith with some material added to the collection by Terry McGrath following Smith's death.

Processing note: Material was reboxed. Original folder titles were maintained when apparent. The typewriter and props were removed from the papers and are stored in the *T-Cabinet. For access to *T-Cabinet items, please contact the Billy Rose Theatre Division for assistance. Appointments may be required to view materials.

Related collections

Smith and Dale papers, 1903-1981. Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Creator history

Smith and Dale were a well-known vaudeville duo who performed together for over seventy years. Joe Smith was born as Joseph Sultzer on February 16, 1884 and Charlie Dale was born as Charles Marks on September 6, 1881. Both men were born in New York City. They met in December of 1898 after getting in an accident while riding bicycles. Both boys had rented bikes from the same shop and they brought they bikes back to the shop bickering with each other all the way. The shop owner told them that they reminded him of Weber and Fields, and that the two should perform together. The two began to sing and dance in the saloons of the Bowery, performing first in black-face. Their names became Smith and Dale when they found a printer who had made up calling cards for a vaudeville act of that name who had subsequently declined to pay for the cards. Smith and Dale got a deal on the cards and their show names, and real names, were changed forever.

In 1900, they joined the Imperial Vaudeville and Comedy Company, which played in the Catskills. After a few years, they returned to New York and began performing with two new partners, Will Lester and Jack Coleman, who were working as singing waiters at the Avon Care on 116th St. Using the name of the saloon, the four became known as The Avon Comedy Four. One of their first sketches was based off of a sketch perfected by Smith and Dale, *The New Schoolteacher*. The Avon Comedy Four would play on different iterations of altercations at a school. Lester and Coleman were later replaced by Irving Kaufman and Harry Goodwin. In 1914, The Avon Comedy Four headlined the first all-American bill at London's Finsbury Park Empire. In 1916, the group added a restaurant sketch, with Smith playing the chef who feigns illness when he gets too many orders. Kaufman left The Avon Comedy Four in 1919 and was replaced by Dale's brother Lew. The quartet ended soon after and Smith and Dale continued as a duo. They developed the new sketch, *Dr. Kronkheit*, which became one of their most famous and long lasting sketches.

In 1929, Paramount did a film short *The False Alarm Fire Company* that was based off of the Smith and Dale sketch *Battery to the Bronx* that first debuted in 1925. The sketch opens with a song, *Canal Street*, and then moved into a scene in the office of lawyer U. R. Struck (played by Dale) and then to Harlem which Smith and Dale placed two firemen who were too busy playing cards to attend a fire.

Aside from vaudeville, the pair appeared in a number of reviews and in several short films and three features, including *Manhattan Parade* (1931), *The Heart of New York* (1932) and *Two Tickets to Broadway* (1951). Additionally, they made frequent television appearances, and participated in the Judy Garland show at the Palace, which opened on October 16, 1951. In their later years, Smith and Dale both became residents of the Actors Fund Home in Englewood, New Jersey. Dale died in 1971. Smith kept on making appearances and performing comedy, including many recordings for Dial-a-Joke, until his death ten years later in 1981.

Scope and content note

The collection documents the careers of vaudeville duo Smith and Dale and contains early material relating to The Avon Comedy Four, an extensive run of scripts for Smith and Dale sketches, and material reflecting the later life and career of Joe Smith following Charlie Dale's death. The collection consists of awards, correspondence, news clippings, photographs, props, writings, and a small amount of legal and financial records. The correspondence is minimal and is often from third parties, usually to, or from, Terrence McGrath, Smith's friend and occasional comedic partner from the 1970s. The correspondence primarily discusses performance rights, the history of Smith and Dale, and includes condolence letters received by McGrath following Smith's death. Of special note is a letter from Arthur "Bugs" Baer to Smith reminiscing about their early years performing together. Photographs contain portraits, sketches, movie

stills, and photographs that include pictures of Smith and Dale, The Avon Comedy Four, Eddie Bracken, George Burns, Walter Matthau, Lee Meredith, George Sidney, Ed Sullivan, Sophie Tucker, and Ed Wynn. The writings have notes regarding sketches going back to The Avon Comedy Four, lyrics for comedic songs, scripts, and an unpublished, unproduced screenplay called *Stage Struck: The life story of Smith and Dale and their Avon Comedy Four* written by Smith and Dale with Aaron Fishman. The scripts are mostly undated and often include working scripts in various iterations, cue cards, and scores. The typewriter is a Smith-Corona Skyriter, which was a small, portable typewriter that would have been easy to travel with.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Key terms

Subjects

Comedians -- United States

Comedy sketches

Jewish comedians -- United States

Vaudeville -- United States

Names

Avon Comedy Four

Dale, Charlie, 1881

Smith and Dale

Smith, Joe, 1884-1981

Special formats

Awards

Contracts

Manuscripts

Photographs

Props

Scores

Scripts (documents)

Container list

Awards

- b.9 Hackensack High School, 1971 (Two wooden plaques)
One reads "Happiest 90th Birthday to the oldest member of the class of 1971," and the other one reads "Awarded to Joe Smith of Smith and Dale in recognition of his grateful assistance and for the generous gift of his time and numerous talents given unselfishly in the students of Hackensack High School."
- b.1 f.1 State Resolution by Senator Feldman, 1976
- b.1 f.2-4 Correspondence, 1948-1981
- b.1 f.5 Dial a Joke, undated
- b.1 f.6 Financial and Legal Materials, 1944-1975
- b.1 f.7 Governor Brendan T. Byrne Performance, 1978-1979
- b.1 f.8 History, 1978-1979, undated
- b.1 f.9 The Jackie Gleason Show Scripts, 1950
- b.1 f.10 The Lambs Tribute to Smith and Dale, 1958
- b.2 f.1 New York University Lecture, undated
- b.2 f.2-6 News Clippings, 1909-1987
- b.3 f.1-3 News Clippings, 1909-1987
- b.3 f.4 Photographs, 1898-1978
- b.10 Photographs, 1932, undated
- b.3 f.5 Press Releases, 1971-1974
- b.3 f.6-7 Programs, 1950-1981

Props

All props are kept in the *T-Cabinet. Please contact the Billy Rose Theatre Division for assistance. Appointments may be required to view materials.

Bowler Hat

Butcher's Knife

Chef's Hat and Coat

Hankerchief

Neckties

Pork Chops (Wooden)

Stethoscope

Toupee

- b.4 f.1 Remembrance Card, 1981
- b.10 Scores, 1944-1955, undated
- b.4 f.3 The Tommy Ambrose Show, 1963

Typewriter

The typewriter is kept in the *T-Cabinet. Please contact the Billy Rose Theatre Division for assistance. Appointments may be required to view this item.

Writings

- b.4 f.4 General, undated
- b.4 f.5 Lyrics, undated
- b.4 f.6 Notes, undated
- Sketches
- b.4 f.7 *Accidents Will Happen*, 1952

Writings (cont.)

Sketches (cont.)

- b.4 f.8 *Are You Insured?*, undated
- b.4 f.9 *Assorted Nuts*, undated
- b.4 f.10 *At the Gate*, undated
- b.4 f.11 *Boost Me*, undated
- b.4 f.12 *Boss and the Chef*, undated
- b.4 f.13 *Bronx Supermarket*, undated
- b.4 f.14 *Clancy's Minstrels*, 1925
- b.4 f.15 *Coffee House*, undated
- b.5 f.1 *The Confession*, undated
- b.5 f.2 *Cuckoo Clock*, undated
- b.5 f.3 *Death of a Television Comedian*, undated
- b.5 f.4 *Doctor Help Me*, undated
- b.5 f.5 *Doctor Kronkheit*, 1920s-1979 (Includes photographs)
- b.5 f.6 *Dollar Bit*, undated
Alternately called *You Owe Me Two Dollars*.
- b.5 f.7 *Doughnuts Sketch*, undated
- b.5 f.8 *The Eskimo National Bank*, undated
- b.5 f.9 *The Ethiopian National Bank*, undated
- b.5 f.10 *The Fare is Three Dollars*, undated
- b.5 f.11 *Father Time*, 1973
- b.5 f.12 *Finkel Birnbaum and Company*, undated
- b.5 f.13 *Fire Fighting Company*, undated
Contains *Apex Fire Fighting Company*, *False Alarm Fire Company*, and *Eureka Fire Fighting Company*.
- b.5 f.14 *Getting a Separation*, undated
- b.5 f.15-16 *Golf Skits*, undated
- b.5 f.17 *Great Little Ceasar's Ghost*, 1933
- b.5 f.18 *Hamlet*, undated
- b.6 f.1 *The Holdup*, undated
- b.6 f.2 *Hungarian Rhapsody*, undated
- b.6 f.3 *In Paris*, undated
- b.6 f.4 *Insurance Bit*, undated
- b.6 f.5 *Journeys End*, undated
- b.6 f.6 *Katz of Scotland Yards*, undated
- b.6 f.7 *Key to My Bedroom*, undated
- b.6 f.8 *Kitchen Scene*, undated
- b.6 f.9 *The Letter Carriers*, undated
- b.6 f.10 *Light Brigade*, undated
- b.6 f.11 *Lost a Wallet*, undated

Writings (cont.)

Sketches (cont.)

- b.6 f.12 *Lots to Sell*, undated
- b.6 f.13 *Man Who Never Forgets*, undated
- b.6 f.14 *The Matchmaker*, undated
- b.6 f.15 *Max's Delicatessen*, undated
- b.6 f.16 *Meet the Press*, undated
- b.6 f.17 *Mind Reader*, undated
- b.6 f.18 *The Ominous Rocks of Truor*, undated
- b.6 f.19 *O. P. A. Price Order Number 287*, undated
- b.6 f.20 *Overheard in a Bronx Super Market*, undated
- b.6 f.21 *Pass to California*, undated
- b.6 f.22 *Pass to Montreal*, undated
- b.6 f.23 *Pass to Philadelphia*, undated
- b.6 f.24 *The Player Who Quit Football*, undated
- b.6 f.25 *Playing Records*, undated
- b.6 f.26 *Poker Game*, undated
- b.6 f.27 *Psychiatrist and Patient*, undated
- b.6 f.28 *Pullman Berth #9*, undated
- b.6 f.29 *Purchase of Manhattan*, undated
- b.6 f.30 *Railroad Ticket Agent*, undated
- b.6 f.31 *Reformer*, undated
- b.7 f.1 *Reunion in Russia*, undated
- b.7 f.2 *Schnapps and Strudel*, undated
- b.7 f.3 *School Teacher*, undated
- b.7 f.4 *Speaking from the Heart*, undated
- b.7 f.5 *S. S. Malaria*, undated
- b.7 f.6 *Sweetheart Dancing*, undated
- b.7 f.7 *Table Scene, 1972*, undated
- b.7 f.8 *The Tailor*, undated
- b.7 f.9 *Tax Consultant*, undated
- b.7 f.10 *Then and Now, 1978*
- b.7 f.11 *Tossing a Coin*, undated
- b.7 f.12 *Vaudeville Ala Carte*, undated
- b.8 f.1 *Violin Lesson*, undated
- b.8 f.2 *We Locked One Another Up*, undated
- b.8 f.3 *What Price Suits*, undated
- b.8 f.4-5 *Unsorted, 1955*, undated
- b.8 f.6-7 *Stage Struck: The life story of Smith and Dale and their Avon Comedy Four, 1955*