



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Helen Curran Collection of Irene Castle Documents and Photographs Albums

NMAH.AC.1202

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Helen Curran Collection of Irene Castle Documents and Photographs Albums
Date:	1940
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1202
Creator:	Fenner, Helen Curran (Compiler) Fenner, Gloria J. (Donor)
Extent:	0.3 Cubic feet (1 box)
Language:	English .
Summary:	One scrapbook of newspaper clippings and one photograph album about and of Irene Castle, notable dancer, film star, and animal rights activist.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated by Ms. Gloria J. Fenner in 2010.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center

Footage of Irene and Vernon Castle's feature film *The Whirl of Life* (1915). The footage can be found in the Ernie Smith Jazz Film Collection (NMAH.AC.0491) under the title *Social Dance, 1903-1961, RV OF491.1*.

There are also several pieces of Castle sheet music in the Sam DeVincent Sheet Music Collection, NMAH.AC.0300. They can be found in series 18, folder "Irene and Vernon Castle".

Processing Information

Processed by Amanda Loeb, intern, August 2010; supervised by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archivist, 2010 and Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, 2010, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Helen Curran Collection of Irene Castle Documents and Photographs Albums, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research but is stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

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Biographical / Historical

Irene Castle and her husband Vernon are considered to be among the forerunners in bringing modern dance to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. She was born Irene Foote on April 17, 1893 in New Rochelle, New York. She met Vernon, a British vaudeville actor and comedian, in 1910, and the couple was married in 1911. Soon after their marriage they moved to France where the couple gained notice for their ballroom dance routines. Upon returning to the United States, the couple rose to stardom with original dances such as the "Texas Tommy," the "Foxtrot," and the "Castle Walk." The Castles were influential in introducing ragtime to American society and elevating the music and dance style to a more sophisticated level. Irene is credited with introducing the flapper look to America, including bobbed hair, straight, loose dresses, and headache bands.

Upon the outbreak of World War One, Vernon left the stage to join the Royal Canadian Flying Corps. Meanwhile, Irene made several feature films, including the popular serial, *Patria*. Vernon was killed in a plane crash while performing a training exercise in Texas on February 15, 1918. Irene never chose another dance partner and ended her public career in 1923.

Irene married three times after Vernon's death. She gave birth to two children with her third husband, Major Frederick McLaughlin. In 1939, Irene was consulted on the biographical film, *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, starring Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. She devoted her later life to humanitarian work, particularly in the field of animal rescue. She established Orphans of the Storm, a shelter for dogs in Deerfield, Illinois, and remained an active advocate of animal rights. Irene died of congestive heart failure in Eureka, Arkansas on January 29, 1969. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, and New York next to Vernon Castle.

Helen Curran was creator of the scrapbooks. Helen's parents, Sam and Edna Curran, were managers of Orphans of the Storm animal shelter. Helen Curran Fenner considered Irene Castle a role model and they became good friends. The donor of this collection, Gloria J. Fenner, was the stepdaughter of Helen Curran.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of materials from one scrapbook and one photograph album. Box one contains photographs and box two various newspaper and magazine clippings. The photographs include images of Irene and Vernon dancing, stills taken from the film, *"The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle"* (1939), personal photographs belonging to Helen Curran taken at Fire Island, and photographs of Orphans of the Storm. The clippings date from 1917 to 1969 and include publicity material from the film *"Patria"* (1917), articles on *Orphans of the Storm*, Irene Castle's role in shaping modern fashion, and several obituaries.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into one series.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Celebrities -- 20th century
Dancers

Types of Materials:

Clippings -- 20th century
Photograph albums -- 20th century
Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 20th century
Scrapbooks -- 20th century

Names:

Castle, Irene, 1893-1969
Castle, Vernon

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	Photograph album, pages 1-18, 1940
Box 1, Folder 2	Photograph album, pages 19-32, 1940
Box 1, Folder 3	Photograph album, pages 33-45, 1940
Box 2, Folder 1	Scrapbook original clippings, 1917-1969, undated Notes: Does not circulate. use reference copy.
Box 2, Folder 2	Scrapbook original clippings, 1917-1969, undated Notes: Reference Copy