



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Ricki Covette Burlesque Collection

NMAH.AC.1335

Patti Williams

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Ricki Covette Burlesque Collection
Date:	1940–2002 (bulk 1950s–1970s)
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1335
Creator:	Covette, Ricki Jewell, Irene (Donor)
Extent:	2 Cubic feet (6 boxes, 2 map folders)
Language:	English , Japanese .
Summary:	Scrapbooks and posters documenting the burlesque career of Irene Jewell (stage name Ricki Covette), who at 6'8" was billed as "The World's Tallest Exotic Dancer."
Digital Content:	Image(s): Ricki Covette Burlesque Collection

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center in 2014 by Irene Jewell (stage name Ricki Covette).

Processing Information

Collection is processed.

Preferred Citation

Ricki Covette Burlesque Collection, 1940–2022, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Social Security numbers are present and have been rendered unreadable and redacted. Researchers may use the photocopies in the collection. The remainder of the collection has no restrictions.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

Born in 1925 in rural Alberta, Canada, Irene Jewell aspired to become a singer and dancer. Moving to the United States in the 1950s, Jewell began a thirty-year career in show business, including theater, small parts in television and film, but especially burlesque, under her stage name "Ricki Covette." Billed as "The World's Tallest Exotic Dancer" at 6'8" and the "Glamazon," Covette's career spanned the peak of burlesque's popularity; her career highlights included headlining at clubs, including an 82-week stint at the ShoBar in New Orleans, Louisiana, and a solo act world tour in Japan, the United Kingdom, and the Americas. Besides her burlesque career, Covette also had parts in theater, including playing the role of Gymnasia in the 1963-1964 tour of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and appearing in the 1966 film *The Swinger*. After she left show business, she started a successful second career as a real estate broker in the Los Angeles area and travelled with her husband, cinematographer Stuart Jewell, shooting footage of nature and culture. In 2010 she appeared in Leslie Zemeckis's documentary, *Behind the Burly!* Covette died in February 2016.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of eight scrapbooks and five posters documenting the burlesque career of Irene Jewell (stage name Ricki Covette), who at 6'8" was billed as "The World's Tallest Exotic Dancer." The albums contain clippings; letters; certificates; photographs, including photographs of her act; ephemera, such as postcards, travel brochures, postcards, and decals, from her travels; advertisements; and theater programs.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1: Scrapbooks

Series 2: Posters

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Burlesque (Theater) -- 1920-1970

Burlesque shows -- 1920-1970

Postcards -- 20th century

Striptease -- 1920-1970

Stripteasers -- 1920-1970

Types of Materials:

Advertisements -- 20th century

Brochures -- 20th century

Certificates -- 20th century

Clippings -- 20th century

Decals

Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.

Photographs -- 1950-2000
Scrapbooks -- 20th century
Theater programs -- 1950-2000

Container Listing

Scrapbooks, 1940–2022

Box 1	Scrapbook 1 "Boots & Saddle", 1951–1964 Notes: This scrapbook (1951–1964) contains the following: clippings; correspondence; photographs, including photographs of her act; ephemera, such as travel brochures, postcards, and decals, from her travels; advertisements; and theater programs. This scrapbook also contains some material relating to Barbara Walters (as her father Lou Walters hired Ricki as an exotic dancer for his Latin Quarter Club), and several examples of Covette's AGVA Standard Form of Artistic Engagement Contract for Exotic Dancing.
Box 2	Scrapbook 2, 1965–1974, 1980 1 Scrapbook (14.5" x 12" x 1.5" flat box) Notes: This album (1965–1974, 1980) contains mostly newspaper clippings; advertisements for Covette's burlesque act; programs, and photographs.
Box 2, Folder 1	Scrapbook 2 pages 1-5, 1965–1966
Box 2, Folder 2	Scrapbook 2 pages 6-11, 1967–1968
Box 2, Folder 3	Scrapbook 2 pages 11-15, 1968–1971
Box 2, Folder 4	Scrapbook 2 pages 16-20, 1967–1973
Box 2, Folder 5	Scrapbook 2 pages 21-25, 1968–1975
Box 2, Folder 6	Scrapbook 2 pages 26-30, 1974–1976
Box 2, Folder 7	Scrapbook 2 pages 31-33, (bulk mid 1970s–1980)
Box 3	Scrapbook 3, 1970s–2000s Notes: This album (1970s–2000s) contains the following: clippings; correspondence; photographs, including photographs of Covette's burlesque act; ephemera, such as travel brochures, postcards, and decals, from her travels; advertisements; and theater programs.
Box 4	Scrapbook 4, (bulk 1950–2002) Notes: This scrapbook (1950–2002) contains the following: newspaper clippings about Covette's career and her husband's (Stuart Jewell) obituaries; correspondence and cards; photographs, both black and white photographs of her burlesque act, as well as snapshots of her and Stuart during their travels filming; ephemera; advertisements

for her burlesque performances; "The Golden Days of Burlesque Historical Society Newsletter" issues; issues of magazines such as *Bare*, *People Today*, and *Potpourri*; and theater programs for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. –

Box 5

Scrapbook 5, 1940s–1970s

Notes:

This scrapbook (1940s–1970s) contains mostly 8 by 10 inch black and white headshots of various actors and performers, either autographed to Irene in the 1940s, or to Ricki in the 1950s–1970s. The individuals include: Jackie Gleason, the cast from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Justine Johnston, Peggy De Vine, Harold Wayne, Frank Lovejoy, Philip Van Zandt, Lia London, Linda Leslee, Sons of the Purple Haze, Eddie Oxford, Thad Swift, Yvonne De Carlo, Ann Beyth, Sam Vine, Jerry Lester, and Ron McPherson.

Box 5

Scrapbook 6, 1960s

Notes:

This scrapbook (mid–1960s) contains mostly 8 by 10 inch black and white photographs of Ricki Covette, along with a few newspaper articles, a copy of an AGBA Engagement Contract, and a program for *The Marriage-Go-Round* (cast included Joan Fontaine and Ricki Covette.)

Box 6

Scrapbook 7, 1950s–1980s

Notes:

This scrapbook (1950s–1980s) contains photographs of Covette, both from her burlesque career and later, as well as snapshots of her friends and travel.

Box 6

Scrapbook 8, 1980s–1990s

Notes:

This scrapbook contains material from the 1980s–1990s relating mostly to Covette's later career in real estate, including photographs, certificates, newspaper articles, and correspondence.

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Posters, circa 1960s -1970s

Map-folder 1	Ad for Ricki Covette. Language: Japanese.
Map-folder 1	Ad for Ricki Covette at Ginza Turkish Bath, Tokyo (copy 1) Language: Japanese.
Map-folder 1	Ad for Ricki Covette at Ginza Turkish Bath, Tokyo (copy 2) Language: Japanese.
Map-folder 2	Oversized black and white photograph of Ricki Covette
Map-folder 2	Oversized black and white photograph of "Ricki Covette Worlds Tallest Exotic Dancer"
Map-folder 3	Ad for Ricki Corvette "World's Tallest Exotic Dancer" at Isy's Supper Club in Vancouver, Canada

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