

**Guide to the C. Richard Gillespie Collection on the James
Adams Floating Theatre, 1927-1940
MS 0350**

The Mariners' Museum Library

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Revised by Bill Barker, 2019

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library
Title: C. Richard Gillespie Collection on the James Adams Floating Theatre
Inclusive Dates: 1927-1940
Bulk Dates: 1927-1940
Catalog number: MS0350
Physical Characteristics: 1 folio box, containing playbills and ephemera
Language: English
Creator: C. Richard Gillespie, 1930-, collector.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Richard Gillespie was born in the early 1930s to Charles Frederick Gillespie and Katharine F. Gillespie, in Lutherville, MD. Dr. Gillespie became a theater teacher at Towson University in Towson, MD, in 1961, where he served until his retirement in 1997. He wrote a book on the James Adams Floating Theatre, published in 1991. Dr. Gillespie died on Apr. 2, 2016.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection relates to the history of the James Adams Floating Theatre from 1927 to 1940. Included in the collection are originals and copies of advertisements and programs.

James Adams was born in 1873 in Ohio, one of eight children, five of whom would enter show business with him. In 1895 he married Gertrude Powlson, however by this time Adams was bored with farming and mill work, he therefore decided to enter show business. In 1902 he began with a circus, the James Adams New Century Show. In 1908 he launched into vaudeville where he would make his fortune that would allow him to retire in 1911. However, bored with retirement in 1913 Adams began building the Floating Theatre. The new Floating Theatre had its first performance in Washington, North Carolina in 1914. James Adams would retire again in 1917 and turned over active management to his older brother Selba Adams with James still making all of the decisions.

This collection covers the years which would mark the transition of ownership. James Adams owned the Floating Theatre from 1914 to 1933 when he sold it due to economic problems brought about by the Great Depression. During the period that James Adams owned the theater, the theater toured the cities and rivers of the mid-Atlantic and Southeast. In May 1933, Nina B. Howard of St. Michaels, Maryland bought the boat for her adopted son, Milford Seymoure, to manage. The Floating Theatre continued to operate until February 1941 when poor business, most likely brought about by the departure of the important and famous players Beulah and Charlie Hunter, forced the theater to close. The Floating Theatre operated a total of twenty-seven years, nineteen as the James Adams and for the other eight years as the Original.

The collection is organized into 6 folders (one oversize), and is arranged by material type, thereunder in chronological order.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

CK 135

Accession Date

1990

Restrictions

The collection is open to all researchers.

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Preferred Citation

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Note to Users

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

RELATED MATERIALS

The museum has photographs of the James Adams Floating Theatre, cataloged as PJ 79c235 - PJ 95c235.

C. Richard Gillespie's book, *The James Adams Floating Theatre*, is cataloged as PN2293.S4 G5.

FILE GUIDE

BOX 1:ADVERTISEMENTS

Folder 1 Programs (Originals)

Spring 1937

Show Boat Players, featuring Charlie Hunter, Beulah Adams, Jack Pfeiffer Gladys Pennington, Jack Keating, and Rene Mahar

Post May 1937

Show Boat Players, featuring Charlie Hunter, Jack Pfeiffer, Beulah Adams, Gladys Pennington, Bob Demorest, Jr., and Marjorie Williams

1938

Show Boat Players, featuring Jack Pfeiffer, Gladys Pennington, Beulah Adams, Charlie Hunter, Rene Mahar and Jack Keating

1938 (3 Copies)

Show Boat Players, featuring Jack Pfeiffer, Gladys Pennington, Beulah Adams, and Charlie Hunter

1939 (3 Copies)

Show Boat Players, featuring Charlie Hunter, Beulah Adams, Gladys Pennington, and Jack Pfeiffer

1940

Show Boat Players, featuring Gladys Pennington, Jack Pfeiffer, Williams & Franklin, and Rudolph Paul

Folder 2 Advertisements (Copies)

1924: Copy, Side A

James Adams' Floating Theatre, 11th Annual Tour

1924: Copy, Side B

"Soeey San"

Folder 3 Tickets

No Date (3 Copies)

Teacher's Courtesy Ticket for announcing the Show Boat Players' performance to their classes

Folder 4 Advertisements (Originals)

1937

Captain Milford Seymour's Original Floating Theatre 24th Annual Tour, featuring Dot Dumas, Neva Brasfield, Thayer Roberts, "Pup" Shannon, and Bonnie Spofford

1939

Show Boat Players present "Yokel Boy" and "The Old Grouch" featuring Beulah Adams, Charlie Hunter, Jack Pfeiffer, and Gladys Pennington

Folder 5

Advertisements (Copies)

1927: Copy, Side A

James Adams' World's Best Floating Theatre 14th Annual Tour

1927: Copy, Side B

Show Boat Musicians, including Harry Masten, Orchestra Leader, Eddie Paul, Comedian and Musical Artist, Della Masten, premier Lady Cornet Soloist, and Van Browne, Wizard of the Piano Accordion

1929: Copy, Side A

James Adams' New Floating Theatre 16th Annual Tour

1929: Copy, Side B

Show Boat Players, featuring Chas. M. Hunter, Beulah Adams, Bobby Giles, Lea Herman, and Jack Herman

1931: Copy, Side A

James Adams; New Floating Theatre 18th Annual Tour

1931: Copy, Side B

Ed. Faltes Orchestra With Many New Novelties, a capable band of musicians and not a "phonograph record."

1937: Copy, Side A

Show Boat Players, featuring Charlie Hunter and Beulah Adams

1937: Copy, Side B

Show Boat Players, featuring Jack Pfeiffer, Gladys Pennington, Toby, and Evelyn David

1939: Copy, Side A

Original Floating Theater 26th Annual Tour

1939: Copy, Side B

"Wiz Bang Revue" featuring Miss Jacqueline Rey, aesthetic dancing, Miss Opal Lee, Acrobatic Dancing, Thayer Roberts, Darl Hulit, Leading Man, and Miss Rochelle Jewell

Oversize Storage A8:D12

Folder 1

No Date

James Adams' New Floating Theatre 17th Annual Tour, featuring Beulah Adams and Chas. M. Hunter

SOURCES CONSULTED

The James Adams Floating Theatre, by C. Richard Gillespie, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, Maryland, 1991

SUBJECTS

James Adams Floating Theatre.

Steamboats—History—20th Century.

Showboats—History—20th Century.