**BAUMGARTNER — Spotlight**

<0 figures>

**In the Spotlight: Digitization and the Keith/Albee Vaudeville Theater Collection**

Baumgartner, J.

In 2014 the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the University of Iowa Libraries a $300,000 grant to fund a project for the stabilization and preservation of a series of vaudeville theater scrapbooks from the Keith/Albee Vaudeville Theater Collection, housed in the University of Iowa Special Collections and University Archives. This collection is among the largest collections of materials related to the vaudeville era in the United States. The 150 scrapbooks document in great detail the Keith/Albee theater in Providence, Rhode Island, from the 1890s to the 1930s, encompassing newspaper clippings and programs as well as detailed managers’ reports. These scrapbooks give a rare glimpse into the full context of the vaudeville era, looking into not only the performances but also the business side of vaudeville, giving researchers a full historical understanding of the topic. Unfortunately, the physical state of these materials has been deteriorating for some time, causing some of the volumes to be restricted from usage, a major blow to such a heavily used collection.

The ultimate goals of the three-year Keith/Albee project are primarily the stabilization, digitization, and online accessibility of all collection materials. It involves the full attention of a conservator and digital librarian, both hired solely for this project. Newly purchased equipment, including a digital reprographic system and Capture One software, will be in use for it, requiring additional training for the project staff. Additionally, complex workflows have been put into place involving the interdepartmental collaboration of a number of different actors. This includes contributors from the special collections, preservation/conservation, cataloging/metadata, and digital publishing departments.

A comprehensive digitization project of this size has been rather unprecedented for the University of Iowa Libraries. At the end of the three-year project, the entire contents of the Keith/Albee Collection are expected to be available to the public for online access. Those researching the early history of film and early-20th-century entertainment will be assisted greatly by the digital access to this collection. It will also encourage and accelerate future research on the history of vaudeville theater. The importance of vaudeville theater in the history of modern entertainment cannot be understated. While it was chiefly an American entertainment, its influence spread worldwide, especially on the early film industry. This collection is rare and invaluable in its detail and completeness in documenting vaudeville and its decline over several decades. While there are a number of vaudeville collections in the United States, the Keith/Albee Theater Collection is one of *the* premier vaudeville archives due to this detail and abundance of behind-the-scenes information, fleshing out the history of this important entertainment.

Overall, a careful amount of planning has been put into place in the implementation of this project. However, there have been a number of different issues involving the stabilization and digitization of the collection scrapbooks. Many of these issues are related to the size and fragility of the collection materials. The conservation librarian has taken many steps to stabilize and improve the condition of the collection, but many careful precautions still need to be taken during the digitization process, especially due to the fact that some of these scrapbook pages are flaking and falling apart upon even the most delicate of handling. Additionally, the overlapping and layered nature of some scrapbook pages has created a challenge for the digitization and online presentation of some of these items. The limited options available in content management systems such as CONTENTdm have created problems for the presentation of complex scrapbooks in an accessible online format. Because of these issues, it has become a challenge to present these scrapbooks in a fully accessible form that also accurately represents the material. A final issue involves keeping this project on target for the entire three-year period, maintaining a consistent level of output in which to complete the project on time. This could prove challenging with possible future unforeseen circumstances within the project and its respective workflows. Some of the above issues have been resolved in interdepartmental meetings on the Keith/Albee digitization project. However, other issues are still currently in discussion. Since this is a recently started three-year project, while we anticipate a number of future challenges, with close interdepartmental collaboration we anticipate the outcome to ultimately be successful.