

# Billy Watson, 1876-1939:

## A Preliminary Inventory of his Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Creator:</b>	Watson, "Sliding" Billy, 1876-1939
<b>Title:</b>	"Sliding" Billy Watson Collection
<b>Dates:</b>	1900-1988 (bulk 1900-1939)
<b>Extent:</b>	1 document box, 2 oversize boxes (1.26 linear feet)
<b>Abstract:</b>	The collection of "Sliding" Billy Watson (1876-1939) documents the career of one of the most popular and wealthy comedians on the burlesque circuit. The bulk of the collection consists of research files that were compiled by Barbara Cohen-Niebauer, a great granddaughter of Billy Watson.
<b>Call Number:</b>	Performing Arts Collection PA-00191
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Note:</b>	This brief collection description is a preliminary inventory. The collection is not fully processed or cataloged; no biographical sketch, descriptions of series, or indexes are available in this inventory.
<b>Access:</b>	Open for research

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### Administrative Information

<b>Acquisition:</b>	Gift of Alan Niebauer, 2006 (G 12486); other materials were assembled from the Albert Davis Collection.
<b>Processed by:</b>	Helen Adair, 2006
<b>Repository:</b>	<a href="#">Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin</a>

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## Scope and Contents

The collection of "Sliding" Billy Watson (1876-1939) documents the career of one of the most popular and wealthy comedians on the burlesque circuit. The famous Billy Watson slide was a sliding gait or a gag in which he slid across the stage on a banana peel. Throughout his career, Watson was frequently confused with "Beef Trust" Billy Watson (d. 1945) who was also an entertainer.

The "Sliding" Billy Watson Collection, 1900-1988 (bulk 1900-1939), is divided into two series, I. Research Files, 1900-1988, and II. Publicity Materials, ca. 1900, undated. The bulk of the collection consists of research files that were compiled by Barbara Cohen-Niebauer, a great granddaughter of Billy Watson, and donated to the Ransom Center by her husband Alan Niebauer in 2006. Cohen-Niebauer organized her files chronologically or by subject, and this arrangement has been retained in Series I.

The research files present a comprehensive record of Watson's career from 1900 to 1939 as recorded in newspapers, theater programs, and legal documents such as police reports and deeds. These files contain reproductions of originals held elsewhere, supplemented by a few pieces of Cohen-Niebauer's correspondence from the 1980s. Series I also includes subject files: a folder about Watson's neocolonial house in Freeport, New York, a letter from Helen Hayes to Cohen-Niebauer, and two folders about the murder of Watson's second wife, Nellie (née) Watson, who was murdered, along with her business partner, in April 1926 in a popular Long Island nightspot.

Series II, Publicity Materials, contains a printed flyer and personal and stage photographs of Billy Watson.

Cohen-Niebauer had previously donated a folder of photocopied clippings about Billy Watson to the Ransom Center. The photocopies and the Billy Watson materials in Series II were transferred from the Theater Biography Collection to this collection in 2006. Elsewhere in the Ransom Center, a photograph of "Sliding" Billy Watson is located in the Florenz Ziegfeld Collection.

Source:

Cohen-Neibauer, Barbara Elayne. *Our Family History: Coopersmith, Rober, Savage (Savitsky), Chaletsky, Shapiro, Diamond, Wolferd, Cohen (Konkevitz), Klotnitsky*. [Philadelphia?]: B. E. C. Neibauer, [1986].

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**Series I. Research Files, 1900-1988**

Chronological files

1900-1909	<b>Container 2.1</b>
1910-1914	<b>Container 2.2-3</b>
1915-1919	<b>Container 2.4</b>
1920-1924	<b>Container 2.5</b>
1925-1929	<b>Container 3.1</b>
1930-1934	<b>Container 3.2</b>
1935-1939	<b>Container 3.3</b>
1944, 1956	<b>Container 1.1</b>
Composites, 1917-1923	<b>Container 1.2</b>
House in Freeport (N.Y.), 1988, undated	<b>Container 3.4</b>
Letter from Helen Hayes to Barbara Cohen-Niebauer, 1984	<b>Container 1.3</b>
Murder of Nellie Watson, 1926, 1988	<b>Container 3.5-6</b>

**Series II. Publicity Materials, ca. 1900, undated**

Flier, "Everybody's Favorite, Billy W. Watson," undated	<b>Container 3.7</b>
Photographs	
Portraits, undated	<b>Container 1.4, 3.8</b>
Stage photographs	
Billy Watson, undated	<b>Container 1.5, 3.9</b>
Billy Watson and Ed Lee Wrothe, undated	<b>Container 3.10</b>
"Sliding Billy Watson's Big Burlesque Chorus," circa 1900	<b>Container 3.11</b>