

Jacob Henry Burn:

An Inventory of His Collection of Nell Gwyn at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Burn, Jacob Henry, -1869
Title:	Jacob Henry Burn Collection of Nell Gwyn
Dates:	1675-1872
Extent:	1 document box (0.42 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Jacob Henry Burn Collection of Nell Gwyn consists of one box of notes and research material about British actress Nell Gwyn. Included are manuscripts, handwritten notes, clippings, correspondence, printed material, and broadsides.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-1771
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	16-03-011-G
Processed by:	Daniela Lozano, 2016
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Eleanor "Nell" Gwyn (also spelled Gwynn, Gwynne) was born on February 2, 1650. Her birthplace is thought to be either Hereford, London, or Oxford. Her mother, Ellen, ran a brothel, and the identity of her father is not known.

In 1664, Gwyn and her older sister, Rose, began working as "orange girls" selling oranges to patrons of the newly built Theatre in Bridges Street, now known as the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Less than a year later, at the age of fourteen, Gwyn began acting. After King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, he reinstated the theatre (which had previously been banned) and legalized acting as a profession for women; earlier, women's parts were played by boys or men. Her first stage appearance was in 1665 alongside the actor, Charles Hart, in *The Indian Emperour*, a drama by John Dryden. That performance was followed by several comedic roles, at which she excelled, and soon she became the leading comedienne of the King's Company.

Gwyn became mistress to King Charles II in 1669 and they had two sons: Charles Beauclerk, born in 1670, who became Earl of Burford and later, Duke of St. Albans; and James Beauclerk, who was born in 1671 and died in 1680.

In early 1687, Gwyn suffered two strokes which left her confined to her bed. She died on November 14, 1687 from apoplexy.

Source:

"Nell Gwyn." Encyclopedia Britannica,
<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Nell-Gwyn-English-actress> (accessed March 2016)

Scope and Contents

The Jacob Henry Burn Collection of Nell Gwyn consists of one box of notes and research material about British actress Nell Gwyn. Included are manuscripts, handwritten notes, clippings, correspondence, printed material, and broadsides dating from 1675 to 1872. The materials were originally gathered or created by Jacob Henry Burn and at least one other unidentified individual.

The collection is housed in nine folders, however the material is not arranged, and the folder contents are not necessarily indicative of any original order or relationship between the materials within them. A large amount of the material, especially items that originally belonged to Burn, are brittle and very fragile and require careful handling.

Little is known about Jacob Henry Burn, but he was the editor of several catalogues including Henry Benjamin Hanbury Beaufoy's *A Descriptive Catalogue of the London Traders, Tavern, and Coffee House Tokens current in the seventeenth century* (1853). Handwritten notes and letters written to Burn related to Gwyn are included in this collection. Many of the notes are written on small slips of paper, and are either filed loose within the folders, or, in some cases, pasted onto larger sheets. A handwritten manuscript draft of a biography of Gwyn written by Burn is located in folder 1.5. Noteworthy in this collection is a transcribed copy of Gwyn's will, located in folder 1.1.

Research material originally belonging to an unidentified individual is also included in this collection. It consists primarily of several handwritten copies of articles and biographies on Gwyn. These notes are differentiated from Burn's notes by the handwriting.

Related Material

Scripts from Nell Gwyn's time period are located in the Ransom Center's Pforzheimer Collection and in the Ransom Center Library. Later material on Gwyn is located in the Ransom Center's Theater Biography Collection.

Index Terms

People

Burn, Jacob Henry, -1869.

Gwyn, Nell, 1650-1687.

Subjects

Actresses--England.

Actresses--Great Britain.

Theater--England.

Document Types

Broadsides.

Clippings.

Correspondence.

Manuscripts.

Container 1.1-9 Notes and research material on Gwyn, 1675-1872