

**Collection #
M1000,
BV 3717-3737**

EDNA AND RED SKELTON COLLECTION 1936-1956

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Processed by

Kathleen Clark
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 3 Manuscript Boxes, 21 Bound Volumes

COLLECTION DATES: 1936-1956

PROVENANCE: J.J. Bonkowski, Cleveland, Ohio, December, 2010

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2010.0380

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Vincennes, Indiana, Richard “Red” Skelton (1913-1997) was the son of a Hagenbeck-Wallace circus clown who died shortly before the birth of his son. As a teenager Red experienced some of his first tastes of show business from the same circus. At the age of 15 he left home and began working as an entertainer in medicine shows, vaudeville, burlesque, showboats, minstrel shows, and circuses. While performing in Kansas City in 1930, Skelton met and married his first wife, Edna Stillwell, who joined him in his vaudeville act. The couple divorced in 1943 although Edna remained as one of Skelton’s chief writers. In 1945 Red married Georgia Davis with whom he had two children, a son Richard who died in 1958 from leukemia and a daughter, Valentina. Red and Georgia divorced in 1972 and in 1973 Red married Lothian Toland.

Beginning in 1938 with *Having A Wonderful Time* Red Skelton appeared in over 30 MGM films during the 1940s and 1950s. On October 7, 1941 Red premiered his own radio show, *The Raleigh Cigarette Program*.

Skelton was drafted in March 1944 and the popular radio show was discontinued on June 6 of that year. Red shipped overseas to serve with an Army entertainment unit as a private. In addition to his own military duties, he was often asked to entertain officers during late night gatherings. His hectic military and entertainment schedule led to a nervous breakdown. After spending three months recovering in a military hospital, Skelton was discharged from the service in September 1945. Following his discharge, Red returned to the United States and resumed production of his popular radio show in December of that year. In 1951, CBS approached Red Skelton to bring his radio program to television.

The Red Skelton Show endured for nearly two decades, running from 1951 through 1970 when CBS chose to cancel production. Red incorporated many of the characters from his radio show into the new television series including Clem Kadiddlehopper, the slow-witted country bumpkin; Gertrude and Heathcliffe, the cross-eyed seagulls; The Mean Widdle Kid, whose most well known expression of “I Dood it!” became a national slogan; and San Fernando Red, the likeable con-man. His most famous character, Freddy the Freeloader, debuted on the television show. The Red Skelton Show finished fourth in the ratings in its first year and won Emmy Awards for both Best Comedy Show (1953) and Outstanding Writing Achievement (1961). In 1988, the Screen Actors Guild presented Red with a Lifetime Achievement Award and in the following year Red was inducted into the International Clown Hall of Fame.

Following the cancellation of *The Red Skelton Show*, Red returned to live performances playing nightclubs, casinos, resorts, and such venues as Carnegie Hall. Some of Skelton’s lesser known accomplishments include writing hundreds of short stories and essays and creating over 5,000 musical compositions, some of which were recorded by Van Cliburn, David Rose, and Arthur Fiedler. In addition, some of Red’s auctioned clown paintings have sold for up to \$80,000.

Red Skelton died of pneumonia on September 17, 1997 at his home in Rancho Mirage, California.

Sources: Information in collection

Biography of Red Skelton: <http://www.redskelton.com/BIOGRAPHY.htm>

Red Skelton biography-Good night and may God bless: http://www.clown-ministry.com/index_1.php/articles/biography_of_red_skelton_americas_favorite_clown_goodnight_and_god_bless/

Red Skelton: <http://wttp.tv.com/red-skelton/person/85417/summary.html>

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains material dating primarily from Skelton's marriage to his first wife Edna during the 1930s and 1940s. The materials are divided into six series: Correspondence, Ephemera, Performance, Creative Work, Military Service, and Bound Volumes.

Correspondence items include letters to Skelton from such notable friends as Don Ameche, Eddie Arnold, Bob Hope, Hedda Harper, Zazu Pitts, Nelson Rockefeller, and Henny Youngman and an unsigned letter to Judy Garland. Also included are several letters and artwork to Edna from Hollywood artist Herb Martin. Several unique fan letters to Skelton and a collection of letters from other people with the surname of Skelton are included in this collection.

Among the ephemera items are typed biographies on both Red and Edna, greeting cards sent to Red, a stamped Christmas card from Red, a war bonds postcard, and an unendorsed NBC check made out to Richard Red Skelton.

Performance related items include publicity photographs of Red and Edna along with a typed sheet of publicity notices. Also included are an RKO Studios contract, professional membership cards issued to and signed by Red Skelton, typed scripts of *Radio Bugs* and the screenplay for *The Fuller Brush Man*, and a review of Red's performance in *Whistling In The Dark* written by Melvin Shaw. Several programs, magazines and news clippings written by or about Red Skelton are included in the performance related series.

The creative work series includes handwritten notes on show bits, partial scripts and several short stories and essays written by Red Skelton.

Red Skelton's military service is documented in the military service series with files containing his classification cards, notice of induction, fitness notice, accident notification card, and soldier's qualification card. His personal memories of time served overseas are recorded in a daily journal and diary entries written during 1944-45.

22 leather bound scripts from Skelton's films, written by either Edna, and/or Red including *I Dood It*, *The Fuller Brush Man*, *Excuse My Dust* and *The People Vs. Dr. Kildare* are part of the bound volume series.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Correspondence

CONTENTS

Letters, cartoon sketches to Edna Skelton and Frank Borzage from Herb Martin, 1936-1946

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Personal letters to Red Skelton from various celebrities, 1937, 1946-1949

Box 1, Folder 2

Letters to Edna and Red Skelton from Zazu Pitts, 1938-1940

Box 1, Folder 3

Letters to Red Skelton: Benefit Appearances, 1941-1950

Box 1, Folder 4

Fan letters to Red Skelton, 1941-1951

Box 1, Folder 5

Letters from others named "Skelton", 1940-1950

Box 1, Folder 6

Original artwork from fans/friends, 1942-1947

Box 1, Folder 7

Letters regarding celebrity softball games, 1943, 1949

Box 1, Folder 8

Letters requesting donations from Red Skelton, 1943-1944

Box 1, Folder 9

Incomplete letter to Uncle Jim and Queenie, ca. 1944

Box 1, Folder 10

Letters and sheet music from Jack McCoy, 1948

Box 1, Folder 11

Letters to Red Skelton from celebrities requesting donations, 1948-1949

Box 1, Folder 12

Signed script releases, 1949

Box 1, Folder 13

Series 2: Ephemera

CONTENTS

Typed biographies of Edna and Red Skelton

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 14

Christmas card with stamped Red Skelton Signature

Box 1, Folder 15

NBC paycheck with letter to Red Skelton, 1941	Box 1, Folder 16
War Bonds postcard, October 7, 1941	Box 1, Folder 17
Uncashed checks, 1941	Box 1, Folder 18
Greeting card to Red Skelton, June 3, 1949	Box 1, Folder 19

Series 3: Performance related items

CONTENTS

CONTAINER

Publicity photographs of Edna and Red Skelton	Box 2, Folder 1
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*These two photographs were originally accessioned in a distinct framed group along with a sketch of "Little Red" that is in Box 2, Folder 28. RESEARCH NOTE: "Little Red" was a nickname most often associated with Red's second wife Georgia, but it is not clear if this nickname was exclusive to her.

Melvin Shaw, review of <i>Whistling in the Dark</i> "	Box 2, Folder 2
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Publicity notices	Box 2, Folder 3
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Signed RKO Radio Studio contract, 1937	Box 2, Folder 4
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Red Skelton professional membership cards, 1937-1950	Box 2, Folder 5
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Programs from <i>The President's Birthday Ball</i> , January, 1940 and 1944	Box 2, Folder 6
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Typed script, <i>Radio Bugs</i> , 1943	Box 2, Folder 7
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Programs from Red Skelton benefit performances	Box 2, Folder 8
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Invitation for Interstate Theatres 40 th Anniversary Celebration, 1946	Box 2, Folder 9
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Raleigh Cigarette advertising sheets featuring sponsorship of the Red Skelton Radio Show, 1946-1947	Box 2, Folder 10
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Clippings (1) Commentary on Red Skelton comedy, (1) photograph of Red Skelton painting.	Box 2, Folder 11
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Revised script of <i>The Fuller Brush Man</i> , 1947	Box 2, Folder 12
1948 Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus Program; 1950 Six Bros. Circus Program	Box 2, Folder 13
April 28-May 4 1956, <i>TV Guide</i> , Red Skelton Cover Story	Box 2, Folder 14

Series 4: Creative Works

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Undated typed script for pantomime routine: <i>Willy Lump Lump Comes Home</i> (Edna and Red Skelton)	Box 2, Folder 15
Typed scripts <i>The Gulpers Gin Program Television Bit</i> (Edna Skelton: 1935)	Box 2, Folder 16
Incomplete notes and ideas on skits and essays (ca.1944)	Box 2, Folder 17
2 typed copies of <i>Delinquent Parents</i> poem, 1946	Box 2, Folder 18
Typed essay <i>Give Thanks</i> , November 7, 1948	Box 2, Folder 19
Typed script for <i>How to Take Care of a Baby</i> by Edna Skelton (2 copies)	Box 2, Folder 20
Typed essay, <i>Are Comedians People?</i>	Box 2, Folder 21
Typed essay, <i>Bring 'Em Back Unwrapped</i> (2 copies)	Box 2, Folder 22
Typed essay, <i>Christmas in December</i>	Box 2, Folder 23
Booklet: <i>Raleigh Presents: The Skelton Scrapbook of Satire, 1947</i>	Box 2, Folder 24
Revised typed script: <i>Redso the Clown</i> , 1948-1949	Box 2, Folder 25
Typed script: <i>The Imaginary Dog</i> (3 copies)	Box 2, Folder 26
Typed script: <i>The Baby Factory</i> , November 26, 1948	Box 2, Folder 27

Photocopy of sketch of "Little Red" (Edna Skelton) by Red Skelton Box 2, Folder 28

*Photocopy of sketch of "Little Red" (Edna Skelton) by Red Skelton and plaque reading 'Red Skelton Sketch of Wife Edna Skelton' (This item was originally accessioned in a distinct framed group along with the two 'publicity photographs' of Edna and Red Skelton that are in Box 2, Folder 1. However, the original sketch is at the Red Skelton Museum Foundation, Vincennes, Ind. RESEARCH NOTE: "Little Red" was a nickname most associated with Red's second wife Georgia, but it is not clear if this nickname was exclusive to her).

Originals, sheet music composed by Red Skelton Box 2, Folder 29

Series 5: Military Service

CONTENTS

CONTAINER

Draft Board certification cards for Red Skelton Box 3, Folder 1

Completed Selective Service questionnaire for Red Skelton, November 21, 1940 Box 3, Folder 2

Correspondence with Draft Board regarding marital status of Red and Edna Skelton, 1943 Box 3, Folder 3

Civilian War Commission letter, button, and informational sheet regarding *Hello Wawa* campaign, October 28, 1943 Box 3, Folder 4

Documents regarding drafting, induction and physical examination of Red Skelton, 1943 -1944 Box 3, Folder 5

Booklet: *Army Services Soldiers Shows*, 1944 Box 3, Folder 6

Red Skelton Life Insurance certificate, June 9, 1944 Box 3, Folder 7

Red Skelton military Training/Service Record punch card, September, 1944 Box 3, Folder 8

Loose photocopies of original sketches by Red Skelton torn from journal, ca. 1944 Box 3, Folder 9

Red Skelton, handwritten journals, 1945 Box 3, Folder 10

Red Skelton, incomplete journal pages	Box 3, Folder 11
Red Skelton Military identification cards, 1945	Box 3, Folder 12
Original journals, "Red's Overseas Diaries," 1945	Box 3, Folder 13
Typed transcripts "Red's Overseas Diaries," 1945	Box 3, Folder 14
Red Skelton discharge papers	Box 3, Folder 15
Letters and certificate of recognition to Red Skelton from US Treasury Department, War Bond Drive, 1949	Box 3, Folder 16
War Department notebook with handwritten notes	Box 3, Folder 17

Series 6: Bound Volumes

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Leather bound script for <i>Flight Command</i> , 8/16/1940	BV3717
Leather bound script for <i>Lady Be Good</i> , 1/24/1941	BV3718
Leather bound script for <i>People Vs. Dr. Kildare</i> , 2/25/1941	BV3719
Leather bound script for <i>Dr. Kildare's Wedding Day</i> , 5/21/41	BV3720
Leather bound script for <i>Whistling In The Dark</i> , 5/26/1941	BV3721
Leather bound script for <i>Panama Hattie</i> , 7/2/1941	BV3722
Leather bound script for <i>Ship Ahoy</i> , 11/28/1941	BV3723
Leather bound script for <i>Maisie Gets Her Man</i> , 2/11/1942	BV3724
Leather bound script for <i>DuBarry Was A Lady</i> , 8/20/1942	BV3725
Leather bound script for <i>As Thousands Cheer</i> , 10/20/1942	BV3726
Leather bound script for <i>I Dood It</i> , 12/12/1942	BV3727

Leather bound script for <i>Whistling In Brooklyn</i> , 4/7/1943	BV3728
Leather bound script for <i>Bathing Beauty</i> , 9/13/1943	BV3729
Leather bound script for <i>The Show-Off</i> , 1/15/1946	BV3730
Leather bound script for <i>Merton Of The Movies</i> , 4/24/1946	BV3731
Leather bound script for <i>The Fuller Brush Man</i> , 10/7/1947	BV3732
Leather bound script for <i>A Southern Yankee</i> , 12/9/1947	BV3733
Leather bound script for <i>The Padded Cell</i> , 4/10/1948	BV3734
Leather bound script for <i>The Yellow Cab Man</i> , 7/15/1949	BV3735
Leather bound script for <i>Watch The Birdie</i> , 4/13/1950	BV3736
Leather bound script for <i>Excuse My Dust</i> , 9/16/1950	BV3737

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 1000).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.