

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

Madeline Parker Groff Collection

Collection # 199

October 2009 version

Abstract

The Madeline Parker Groff Collection documents the vaudeville career of two young physical culture devotees, Maurice Bellclaire and Benjamin Morris, and their manager, Fred Paulo, who also had his own act. Also documented is the creation, by Maurice Bellclaire and Fred Paulo, of a summer resort on the south shore of Reeds Lake, East Grand Rapids, Michigan, which catered mainly to vaudevillians and theatrical troupes. This resort operated from 1907 until the early 1920s.

Included are scrapbooks from the touring days of the Bellclaire brothers and Paulo, pictures and negatives from the operating period of the Point Paulo summer resort on Reeds Lake, and a scrapbook documenting the realty operation run by Maurice Bellclaire, 1946-1949.

Madeline Groff (nee Parker), 1893-1972, was a native of Warroad, Minnesota who became a professional singer following college, working in New York, as well as traveling on the vaudeville circuit. Following the war, she moved to Grand Rapids and worked for her sister and brother-in-law, Marian and Arthur Kerns, who operated Kern's Cafeteria. Very little in the collection reflect Madeline Parker Groff's own life. The last folder has images of her and other brief biographical information.

Collection #: 199

Accession #: 1996.004

Donor: Laura Shoemaker

Span dates: 1903-1968

Processor: James Winslow, October 1996; inventory, Betty Gibout, Apr. 2000; finding aid updated, R. Mayne, June 2000 ; reboxing for better fit & finding aid update, R. Mayne, June 3, 2002.

Size: 2.1 linear ft. (25.0 in.)

Related Collections

Coll. 194, Gordon Harrington Collection.

See also staff for additional holdings related to Reeds Lake and Ramona Park.

Box Summary

Box No.	Description	Box Description
<hr/>		
Box Inventory September 2009		
1	Documents, Music, Postcards	Slim
2	Scrapbook	Clam
3	Negatives	Gray lid 3x10x13
4	Negatives	Gray lid 3x10x13

5

Photographs

Gray lid 3x10x13

Groff Coll.
Coll. # 199

Biography

Madeline Groff (nee Parker), 1893-1972, was a native of Warroad, Minnesota who became a professional singer following college. She sang with the New York Metropolitan Opera, on the vaudeville circuits, and operated a voice and music studio in New York City. She performed on the vaudeville circuits for about ten years, then concentrated on her studio and opera work. A soprano, she once sang the lead in Madame Butterfly with the Metropolitan Opera, as well as many supporting roles.

A friend of stage and screen actors, she was in England during the summer of 1939 and returned to the United States on Queen Mary shortly after England declared war on Germany. Following the war, she moved to Grand Rapids and worked for her sister and brother-in-law, Marian and Arthur Kerns, who operated Kern's Cafeteria. When the cafeteria was sold, she worked as a salesperson in a local women's clothing store.

Because of her ties to the performing arts community, she was acquainted with the vaudevillians summering on Reeds lake when she came to Grand Rapids. She developed several friendships with the former vaudevillians there and as a result collected the material in this collection.

Scope and Content

Groff's collection documents the vaudeville career of two young body builders in the early 20th century, and their manager, who also had an act. Included are two scrapbooks with newspaper reviews of their act, playbills, programs, and some photos. A third scrapbook documents the later life career in real estate of one of the body builders in the Grand Rapids area. Also documented is the purchase and operation of a summer resort on Reeds Lake by the act manager and one of the body builders, from 1907 to the early 1920s, which catered to vaudevillians and theatrical troupes. Documentation of the resort is through negatives, photos, plat maps, and an ink drawing. Additionally, there are a number of posed pictures of the body builders in action.

Background: Two immigrant young men, both interested in, and practioners of, physical culture met in a gym in New York City about 1900. They excercised together, became friends, and soon performed tricks together as a team. In 1903, they won an amateur night competition at Miners Eighth Avenue theater and decided to turn professional. Though not related, they were booked in the Keiths vaudeville circuit organization as the "Bellclaire Brothers." They put out ads to find a manager, and met Fred Mongeon, who had his own act as Fred Paulo of "Paulo & Marlow." The three became friends, and frequently booked both acts together. They appeared in New York, Boston, New Orleans, St. Louis, Omaha, and Denver to mention a few stops.

In 1907 they visited Grand Rapids and fell in love with the area. Fred Mongeon with Maurice Bellclaire purchased 22 acres of land on the south side of Reeds Lake and established a summer resort called "Point Paulo" which catered to their fellow vaudevillians and theatrical troupes. The resort operated until the 1920s, but its size was scaled back beginning in 1913 with the platting and sale of part of the property to private parties. Gradually the resort was phased out, though Fred continued to live on the site. In 1930, Fred became a realtor, with Maurice as salesman. In 1937, Fred Paulo died, but Maurice continued the real estate business until the mid 1950s. He continued to reside on Point Paulo until his death in 1973.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
		Series I. Correspondence, 1909-1931.
1	1	Fred Paulo from Madison, WI to a woman friend, 11/1/1909.
1	2	Fred Paulo from Muskegon, MI woman regarding gift of Pekinese dog, 9/17/1931.
1	3	New Years greetings for Maurice Bellclaire and Fred Paulo from Roland Taylor, 1930s.
		Series II. Music, 1921-1940.
1	4	"Farewell Dear Pal, Goodbye", 1921.
1	5	"Way Up Among the Green Pine Trees", 1922.
1	6	G.R. Symphony Orchestra Program, 11/15/1940.
		Series III. Miscellaneous, 1910-1968
1	14	Land contract on Bellclaire Addition property between F. Mongeon and J. Fitzgerald, 6/14/1910.
1	15	Christmas card from William Jacks "The House that Jack Built", 1916.
1	16	4 photocopies of plat maps. Paulos Addition & Bellclaire, n.d. Addition plats and area, 1910-1968.
1	17	Invoice & statement from Grand Rapids Herald for house rental advertisement, 10/1935. (3 found 6/3/2002)
1	18	Bellclaire Realty Newspaper listings, 5/22/1949, for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1411 East Fulton• 1013-1015 Wealthy
1	19	2-Letterhead "Good Housekeeping Shop" 25 Division Ave., S., Grand Rapids, MI, c1950s.
1	20	Newspaper articles on "Point Paulo," 1913-1914. (3 fnd. 6/3/2002. One is graphic, with sketches by Hollis??, July 7, 1914.

Series IV. Scrapbooks, 1903-1949

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | Belleclaire Brothers Act-Reviews and Programs, 1903-1906. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many loose items, mostly clippings, many not local• Keith's Theatre Program, Week of Aug. 8, 1904
Good example of Art Nouveau graphics, include cover of ornate B.F. Keith's Theatre.• Also includes programs from other national theaters of the time + clippings. |
| 2 | 2 | Moved to Box 1, 6/3/2002 |
| 1 | x | Belleclaire & Kramer Act-Reviews, 1906-1907. |
| 2 | 3 | Advertising & descriptions of Belleclaire Realty, 1946-1949. |
| 2 | 4 | 3-Loose pages of Reeds lake, 1910s-1930s. (20 photos?) |

Series V. Graphics

Postcards, 1909-1940.

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | 7 | German Building, Jackson Park, Chicago, IL, 1909. |
| 1 | 8 | MacDonough, Ethel, 1910s. "Playing at the Empress Theatre, G.R." |
| 1 | 9 | Zomah, 1910s. "...At the Empress Theatre..." |
| 1 | 10 | Havemanns Raubtierschule [Lion taming act], 1916. |
| 1 | 11 | House on Reeds Lake, 1930s. |
| 1 | 12 | Monroe Avenue looking north. c1935. |

Artwork, ca. 1910s.

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | 13 | Moved to Box 2, 6/3/2002 |
| 2 | x | Sketch. "Point Paulo Summer Resort, Grand Rapids, Mich. / A. Tozart, n.d. Reeds Lake, East Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1910s? Original [Pencil, ink, gauche & watercolor on board?] + laser copy. |

Series V. Graphics
Negatives, 1920s-1040s.

Processing note: All the items in Boxes 3 & 4 are 4x5 or 4x6 negatives that would be better housed in a smaller box, 6/2002.

Pt. Paulo summer resort, Reeds Lake, 1900s to 1940s.

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 3 | 1 | Three lakefront cottages (Oxford, Palace, & Alcazar).(1) |
| 3 | 2 | Pt. Paulo summer resort from boat. (1) |
| 3 | 3 | Four cottages & lakefront view. (1) |
| 3 | 4 | Cottages & main house from east. (1) |
| 3 | 5 | Shoreline cottages (2 negatives). (2) |
| 3 | 6 | "Long Acre" cottage at Pt. (1) |
| 3 | 7 | Group in front of "Oxford" cottage (2 negatives). |
| 3 | 8 | Man & woman on cottage porch. (1) |
| 3 | 9 | Large group of women. (2) |
| 3 | 10 | Group on cottage porch. (1) |
| 3 | 11 | View, from woods, of lakefront cottage. (1) |
| 3 | 12 | Male couple embracing. (1) |
| 3 | 13 | Man in boat. (1) |
| 3 | 14 | Couple in rowboat. (1) |
| 3 | 15 | Two men standing next to boat. (1) |
| 3 | 16 | Man on dock. (1) |
| 3 | 17 | Large group of dock (2 negatives). CHECK |
| 3 | 18 | Large group of bathers on dock (2 negatives). |
| 3 | 19 | Man diving off (3 negatives). |
| 3 | 20 | Belleclaire (?) in bathing suit, doing handstand. (1) |
| 3 | 21 | Acrobats entertaining on (3 negatives). |
| 3 | 22 | Vaudeville troupe doing acrobatics on dock.(1) |
| 3 | 23 | Fred Paulo & another man in bathing suits on dock. (1) |
| 3 | 24 | Group on dock, with man diving from.(1) |
| 3 | 25 | Man doing flip from dock roof. (1) |
| 3 | 26 | Man on dock. (1) |
| 3 | 27 | Woman in checked coat on dock. (1) |
| 3 | 28 | Girl holding drum while man plays. (1) |
| 3 | 29 | Couple on dock. (1) |
| 3 | 30 | Three women, with man holding fish, on shore.(1) |

Series V. Graphics
Negatives, 1920s-1040s.

Note: All of the following have 1 negative in each folder.

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 3 | 31 | Three women and man (women holding fish) on shore. |
| 3 | 32 | Fred Paulo & second man in amphibian plane. |
| 3 | 33 | Fred Paulo (holding dog) and Maurice Bellclaire on steps of main house. |
| 3 | 34 | Dining room of main house. |
| 3 | 35 | East side porch on main house. |
| 3 | 36 | East side elevation view of main house. |
| 3 | 37 | Street side view of main house. |
| 3 | 38 | Street side view of main house with man. |
| 3 | 39 | Main house from lakeside. |
| 3 | 40 | Group on porch of main house. |
| 3 | 41 | Front view of main house. |
| 3 | 42 | Side (west) view of main house. |
| 3 | 43 | Main house & pump house (from rear. |
| 3 | 44 | Three-quarter view from street side of main house. |
| 4 | 1 | Dining room in main house. |
| 4 | 2 | View thru door of dining room in main house. |
| 4 | 3 | Woman with dogs on porch of main house. |
| 4 | 4 | Porch & furniture at main house. |
| 4 | 5 | Porch with two people on it, at main house. |
| 4 | 6 | Man & dog on side porch of main house. |
| 4 | 7 | Fred Paulo(?) and Maurice Bellclaire(?) next to porch at main house.
[print available] |
| 4 | 8 | Woman with several dogs on side porch of main house. |
| 4 | 9 | Woman in chair, holding dog, on side porch of main house. |
| 4 | 10 | Five people, each holding dog. |
| 4 | 11 | Group holding dogs by fence. |
| 4 | 12 | Maurice Bellclaire(?) and Fred Paulo(?) next to main house. |
| 4 | 13 | Geese on Reeds Lake near Pt. Paulo. |
| 4 | 14 | Two men holding dogs and standing to house porch. |
| 4 | 15 | Two women standing next to porch. |
| 4 | 16 | House and man in pickup truck (Point Paulo?), c1920s. |

Series V. Graphics
Negatives, 1920s-1040s.

Note: All the following has 1 negative in each folder.

Tropical Park Locale, c1920s.

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 4 | 17 | Fred Paulo and woman. [print available] |
| 4 | 18 | Fred Paulo and woman. [print available] |
| 4 | 19 | Fred Paulo and woman. |
| 4 | 20 | Fred Paulo & woman, with seated group, at night. |
| 4 | 21 | Fred Paulo & woman, seated on bench. |
| 4 | 22 | Fred Paulo & woman, standing next to large tree. |
| 4 | 23 | Fred Paulo & woman, standing in front of gazebo. |
| 4 | 24 | Woman in front of shrub. |
| 4 | 25 | Fred Paulo & woman, on bench in front of large plant. |

Series V. Graphics
Photographs, 1903-1954.

Body building poses

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 5 | 1 | Maurice Bellclaire (7 photos), c1904. |
| 5 | 2 | Benjamin Morris (9 photos), c1904. |
| 5 | 3 | Bellclaire brothers (3 photos) c1903. |

Pt. Paulo Summer Resort-Reeds Lake

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 5 | 4 | Two women with Fred Paulo & Maurice Bellclaire, c1920s. (1) |
| 5 | 5 | Group of men in dining room at main house, late 1910s? (1) |
| 5 | 6 | Bellclaire brothers & friends in seaplane (6 photos). |
| 5 | 7 | Fred Paulo (with dog) & Maurice Bellclaire.(1) |
| 5 | 8 | Fred Paulo (L) & Maurice Bellclaire. (1) |
| 5 | 9 | Fred Paulo & dog. (1) |
| 5 | 10 | Bellclaire & Paulo home on Frederick Road (former main house). (1) |
| 5 | 11 | Dock & boat area (2 photos). |
| 5 | 12 | Large group standing on dock. (1) |
| 5 | 13 | "Countess Rose & Mons. Paulo" vaudeville act publicity shot, c1906 (2 photos, only 1 found 4/2000!). |

Tropical park locale, c1920s-30s.

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 5 | 14 | Fred Paulo (standing) & woman. (1) |
| 5 | 15 | Fred Paulo & woman holding hands. (1) |
| 5 | 16 | Man & woman. (1) |
| 5 | 17 | Two couples posing outside home, 1900s? (1) |
| 5 | 18 | Benjamin Morris (L) & young couple (sister & brother(?)) in front of store, c1900. (1) |
| 5 | 19 | Large home with family (possibly Ben Morris') on front porch, c1900s. (1) |
| 5 | 20 | Major A.B. Watson on Reeds Lake, c1900s. (1) |
| 5 | 21 | Older man standing outside building (Maurice Bellclaire(?), c1950. (1) |
| 5 | 22 | Cottage & guesthouse at Brower Lake for sale by Bellclaire Realty, 1949 (6 photos). |
| 5 | 23 | Homes for sale by Bellclaire Realty (2):
600 Paris St. SE, Grand Rapids.
2705 E. Paris Rd SE, Paris Township. |

Series V. Graphics

Photographs, 1903-1954.

- 5 24 Building for sale by Bellelaire Realty. 255 S. Division Ave. purchased by Mr. Kearns, 1950s (2 photos, Good Housekeeping Shop).
- 5 25 Kerns Cafeteria interior, 41 Ionia Ave., GrandRapids, MI (4 photos; 2 postcards).
- 5 26 Town House Cafeteria interior with owners family (Kerns) and employees, 1954 (2 photos).
- 5 27 Stream with water wheel. (1)
- 5 28 Utility trailer (possibly at Pt. Paulo) 1930s. (1)

5 29 **Biographical.**

- Madeline Parker Groff portraits-(2)
- a newspaper article on professional appearance
- funeral home card at death.