

Pearl Bailey papers

G95.013

**Finding aid prepared by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden
Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories
using data provided by the African American Museum in Philadelphia.**

Last updated on April 28, 2014.

African American Museum in Philadelphia

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Summary Information

Repository	African American Museum in Philadelphia
Creator	Bailey, Pearl
Title	Pearl Bailey papers
Call number	G95.013
Date [bulk]	1970-1979
Date [inclusive]	1946-1990
Extent	40 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Pearl Bailey (1918-1990) was an American entertainer notable for her sultry singing and mischievous humor. She appeared on Broadway, in movies, and on her own television show. Bailey also authored several books. In 1975 she was appointed special ambassador to the United Nations by President Gerald Ford; she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Ronald Reagan in 1988. The Pearl Bailey papers, 1946-1990 (bulk 1970-1979), include scrapbooks, recordings, correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, writings, financial records, and other materials relating to Pearl Bailey. Most document her public life in the 1970s, especially her career as a singer and actress, a cultural ambassador, and an author. A smaller quantity of materials relate to her personal life, including her finances, family, and college education at Georgetown University.</p>

Biography/History

"[Pearl Bailey was born Pearl Mae Bailey in Newport News, Va., on March 29, 1918. She grew up for the most part in Philadelphia] where her mother resettled with her four children - Pearl was the youngest - after divorcing her father, an evangelical minister, and remarrying [around the time that Pearl was four]. Pearl originally wanted to be a teacher, but left William Penn High School at fifteen when she realized she wanted to be an entertainer even more. Singing and dancing were certainly an important part of her childhood; she began doing both in her father's church when she was just three, and, indeed, much of her talent was shaped by the lively worship of the holy roller churches she attended.

"Philadelphia, in those years, was an important hub on the vaudeville circuit. Pearl's older brother, Bill Bailey, a dancing protégé of legendary hooper Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, had already made a name for himself when Pearl decided to enter a talent contest at the aptly named Pearl Theater, where he was appearing. She won - \$5 and a two-week engagement. She won another contest that summer in Washington, D.C., then honed her talent - and personality - in the vaudeville theaters of Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Pottsville, and other Pennsylvania coal towns before moving on to the smoky night clubs of Baltimore and Washington. Barely twenty, she began touring as a featured vocalist with a string of swing-era Big Bands, and when World War II broke out, began a lifelong association with the USO, entertaining American troops.

"Bailey's big break came in 1944. The Village Vanguard, a popular New York club, booked her as a solo performer. More importantly, the club's owner encouraged her to engage more with her audiences between songs - and even in songs - with the endearingly mischievous, suggestive, good-natured chit-chat and bons mots that ultimately became her on-stage signature. Her popularity soared, and she quickly rose from nightclub headliner to big-band star with Cab Calloway's orchestra, and then to Broadway sensation when lyricist Johnny Mercer and composer Harold Arlen tapped her in 1946 for their all-black musical, *St. Louis Woman*. "Pearl Bailey pulls the show up by its shoestrings every time she makes an entrance," one reviewer rhapsodized. The theater establishment agreed, honoring her as the best newcomer to Broadway that year.

"For the next five decades, Bailey remained a multi-media star. She moved easily from the stage to the recording studio to the screen - most notably in movies like 1954's *Carmen Jones*, Oscar Hammerstein's languid, all-black adaptation of the opera "Carmen;" the 1956 comedy, *That Certain Feeling*, with Bob Hope; and the 1959 film version of George Gershwin's classic *Porgy and Bess* - and, of course, back to the intimacy of the nightclubs and cabarets that best showcased her personality. Her style also translated well into television. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, she regularly appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Perry Como Show*, and other variety programs, briefly hosted her own *Pearl Bailey Show*, and later had a supporting role on the sitcom *Silver Spoons*. She also managed to write six books, including two volumes of memoirs.

"Bailey's most celebrated triumph arrived in an unlikely form - as the redoubtable Yonkers matchmaker Dolly Levi in the 1967 revival of the 1964 Broadway smash, *Hello, Dolly!* The role was so identified with Carol Channing, the ash-pale actress who created it, that the producers daringly reconceived the play with an all-black cast at the height of the Civil Rights movement. Bailey, gushed the *New York Times* critic,

"took the whole musical in her hands and swung it around her neck as easily as if it were a feather boa." The show ran for two years, and she later toured with it twice. At a special performance in Washington with Lyndon Johnson in the audience, she waved to the president at the curtain and announced, "I didn't know this child was going to show up," then playfully reduced the leader of the Free World to chorus boy, gleefully coaxing him to the stage for a reprise of the show's title song.

"If all of that says much about Pearl Bailey, it barely scratches the surface of who she was and what she believed. In an age when interracial unions were virtually taboo, she married white jazz drummer Louis Bellson Jr. in 1952, simply because she loved him, and they remained together until her death in 1990. As a humanitarian, she regularly spoke out for the oppressed and disenfranchised - 'Every man has a place in this world,' she insisted, 'but no man has a right to designate that place' - and while the old USO trouper was always willing to spread American good will, she warned President Nixon when he offered her his fanciful ambassadorship in an era troubled by racial tensions, that 'I will do anything for my country, but no one can use me.'

"Bailey was so noted for her conscience and convictions - 'I bleed for the world,' she liked to say, 'and if we get a few more bleeders out there, we'll get something done' - that three future presidents - [Gerald] Ford, [Ronald] Reagan (who also bestowed on her the Presidential Medal of Freedom), and [George H. W.] Bush gave her the more serious appointment of special representative to the United Nations. When Georgetown University bestowed an honorary degree on her in 1970, the one-time high-school dropout decided she would earn one properly - through hard work and study. In 1985, at the age of sixty-seven, she graduated from Georgetown with a degree in theology. She considered it, unquestionably, her proudest achievement."

In 1990, Pearl Bailey passed away from a heart attack at a hotel in Philadelphia where she was staying while undergoing therapy for a knee replacement surgery she had six weeks before.

Bibliography:

Quoted text from: ExplorePAhistory.com. "Pearl Bailey Historical Marker." 2011. Accessed on April 28, 2014. <http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-25C>.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes scrapbooks, recordings, correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, writings, financial records, and other materials relating to the life and career of Pearl Bailey. Most document her public life in the 1970s, especially her career as a singer and actress, a cultural ambassador, and an author. A smaller quantity of materials relate to her personal life, including her finances, family, and college education at Georgetown University.

Scrapbooks constitute the largest segment of this collection. They are comprised of correspondence--including letters from well-known performers, politicians, and intellectuals--and invitations, clippings, photographs, ephemera, and other documents. Mostly from the 1970s, they are organized roughly by

date and subjects such as particular shows/performances, trips abroad, or books. An inventory of the scrapbooks is available on-site.

The collection also includes a large number of recordings in the form of LPs (33 and 78 rpm) and reel-to-reel tapes, as well as some audiocassette tapes and 8 mm films. There are recordings of Pearl Bailey, recordings of Louie Bellson, other jazz and swing artists, and some Broadway productions. An item listing of the recordings is available on-site.

Also in this collection are some of Bailey's writings, such as poems, speeches, and book manuscripts; personal insurance and financial papers; a large number of photographs and negatives; a few telephone and address books; and various other materials. A rough inventory listing is available on-site.

Administrative Information

African American Museum in Philadelphia

Finding aid prepared by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories using data provided by the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

Sponsor

This preliminary finding aid was created as part of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. The HCI-PSAR project was made possible by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Access Restrictions

Contact African American Museum in Philadelphia for information about accessing this collection.

Immediate Source of Acquisition Note

Accession AAMP.G95.013.

Processing Information Note

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2012-2014 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact African American Museum in Philadelphia directly for more information.

Related Materials

Separated Archival Materials Note

31 books donated with the collection were removed to the African American Museum in Philadelphia library.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- United Nations

Geographic Name(s)

- Lake Havasu City (Ariz.)
- New York (N.Y.)
- Philadelphia (Pa.)
- Washington (D.C.)

Personal Name(s)

- Bailey, Pearl
- Bellson, Louis
- United States. President (1974-1977 : Ford)

Subject(s)

- Actresses
- African American women
- Ambassadors
- Authors
- Celebrities
- Entertainers
- Jazz singers

Collection Inventory

Audiovisual recordings.

Other Finding Aids Note

An item-level listing of the audiovisual recordings in this collection is available on-site.

Records.	Boxes 1 - 10
Reel to reels.	Boxes 11 - 12
Audiocassettes.	Box 13

Videotapes.

Pearl Bailey Show, 4 tapes.

Dinah Show, 2 tapes.

Papers and photographs.

	Box
Photos - mostly black and white publicity and performance pictures.	14
Notes taken while attending Georgetown University, 1977-1980.	15
Clippings, 1971-1982.	16

Objects

Correspondence - incoming letters from entertainers, businessmen, and heads of state, 1956-1990.	17
Financial and legal documents - show receipts, passport, contacts, and insurance papers.	18
Papers - poems, biographies, material from Egypt trip, notes and drafts for publication.	19
New talent information, programs, magazine articles.	20
Photos with entertainers and heads of state.	21
Certificates - 25 award certificates and high school diploma.	25

Objects.

Knick-knacks.	Boxes 22 - 23
Award plaques (4).	Box 24

Scrapbooks.

Photos and clippings related to "comeback" after period of hospitalization (includes letter from Milt Hinton), 1973.

	Item
Thank you letters for cookbook (includes letters from Lady Bird Johnson and George Burns), 1973 August-October.	2
Reviews of "Hello Dolly," letters of admiration, and various clippings, 1973.	3

Scrapbooks

Clippings related to variety show debut; thank you notes for various gifts; notes from Boston and Philadelphia trips; reviews of the film "Landlord", 1971.	4
Congratulations, reviews, and notes related to television show debut; photographs; Ford's Theater reception and performance, 1971.	5
Thank you notes (including letters from Grace Kelly, Irving Berlin, Barry Goldwater, George McGovern, Spiro Agnew, Hubert Humphrey, and Helen Hayes); cookbook cover and photo with Ella Fitzgerald, 1971-1975.	7
Television variety show clippings and telegrams of congratulations, circa 1971.	10
Nixon Years: photographs, inauguration invitation, letters from Nixon as Vice President, correspondence from Nixon and from members of his cabinet, 1957-1973.	11
1975.	12
Letters from Egyptian Embassy, Ivory Coast, Bing Crosby, and Washing Machine advertising/promotional material.	13
Trip to Egypt: photographs with unidentified dignitaries, school visit photos, and charity correspondence, 1976 May.	14
Photographs; letters from Zsa Zsa Gabor and other admirers; press release for commencement speech at Georgetown University; invitations to various receptions; USO program "Salute to Betty Ford".	15
Newspaper interviews, invitations to United Nations receptions for ambassadors, etc., 1976.	19
Various thank you notes; photographs from Georgetown Commencement; Academy Award Presentation for Best Foreign Film, 1977.	20

Scrapbooks

Invitations; photo of H. Porter; photo of Gerald Ford, Pearl, and Louis; SAG award clippings; unidentified dignitaries in various photos; letter from Queen Hussein; fan letters; White-Westinghouse ad campaign; letters from Iran and Jordan, 1977.	22
Letters from the United Nations, Secretary of Defense, Gerald Ford, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jimmy Carter; invitations and letters; clippings related to position as Special Advisor to the United States Mission to the United Nations; family photographs, 1976-1977.	23
Thank you notes for Pearl Bailey's book, <i>Hurry Up and Spit, America</i> ; invitations; United Nations badge; newslippings; letters from Roy Wilkens, Richard Nixon, and Betty Ford; discussion of "retirement" from entertainment and further commitment to public service, 1975-1976.	24
Pearl Bailey at Nixon White House: clippings, photographs, ephemera, etc., 1974 March.	25
"Pearl's Kitchen": show script and photos.	26
Middle East performances (Egypt, Jordan, Iran): letters and clippings, 1974.	27
Embassy of Iran: letters, invitations and photos of reception for Jordanian politicians, letters from Tehran and Jordan, 1974 June-October.	28
United Nations material, letters, and invitations (includes letters from President Carter, Mickey Rooney, Shah of Iran, and Betty Ford), 1976-1977.	29
Invitations for reception for King Hussein, clippings, letters from Iranian Embassy and Shah's office, 1973-1977.	30
Invitations, photographs of Pearl, performance photographs, circa 1950s.	31
Clippings relating to Pearl Bailey book, <i>Hurry Up America, and Spit</i> ; letters; photographs from 1946 performance; photographs from Aman and Jordan, 1946-1976.	32

Scrapbooks

<i>Pearl's Kitchen</i> clippings, thank you notes for book, reviews, 1973.	33
Photograph with Shah of Iran and letter from Iranian Embassy; photograph with Louis and Betty Ford; Screen Actors Guild award photographs; newsclippings; invitations; letter of acceptance to Georgetown; photographs with King Hussein, 1977.	34
Invitation to Reagan inauguration; telegram from Ambassador of Egypt; newsclippings from Liberty Bowl; Cape Cod visit; letters from Samuel Goldwyn, Jr., Gerald Ford, Anthony Quinn, 1980.	35
Letters from Israel, Jordanian Embassy, Henry Kissinger, members of the United States Congress, Bob Packwood, May Martin, 1982.	36
White-Westinghouse advertising materials that Bailey helped to promote.	37
Mike Douglas Show: photographs with Benny Goodman, Louis Bellson, and Frankie Lane.	38
Westinghouse reception photographs; letters from students with Bailey autographs, 1979.	39
Photographs: "Hello Dolly" reception with Cab Calloway, variety show with Louis Armstrong, etc.	40
Mike Douglas Show with unidentified persons.	41
Mike Douglas Show: photographs with Anthony Quinn, Sally Field, and unidentified individuals.	42
Pearl Bailey Show photographs: Perry Como, Ella Fitzgerald, Mike Douglas.	43
Pearl Bailey Show photographs, fan mail, letters from Vincent Price, Phylis Diller, Conrad Hilton, Delores Hope, 1973.	44
Interview clipping; invitations; newsclippings; Gerald Ford-related materials; photo with Muhammad Ali; letter from Kurt Waldheim, 1976.	45

Scrapbooks

Letters from Governor Holton of Virginia, Joan Crawford, Frank Sinatra, Richard Nixon, Sandy Duncan, Hank Aaron (with photographs), 1971-1974.	46
Newclippings; letters from Gerald Ford, Ambassador from Iran, Barry Goldwater, Duke Ellington, Bing Crosby, Mike Douglass, 1977.	47
3rd Annual Kraft Salute (Pearl Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Betty Ford): photographs, clippings, reviews, etc., 1979 March.	48
Letters from Tom Bradley, David Rockefeller, photographs from Communications Award Ceremony, Jim Henson, Jerry Lewis, Diahann Carroll, Gerald Ford, Ambassador of Surinam, Lillian Gish, Walter Mondale, George Bush, 1979-1980.	49
Clippings on Las Vegas show; story on Bellson with photos; letters from Stan Irvin and Eubie Blake, 1979.	50
Las Vegas show reviews; fan letters and letters from Joan Crawford and Betty Ford, 1979.	51
Personal photos: celebrity friends and their families, photos from various parties and shows, signed photo from Queen Elizabeth II.	52
Tehran journal clippings; Georgetown years; invitation to Carter White House; letters from Betty Ford, Shah of Iran, Secretary for King of Jordan, Gerald Ford, Henry Fonda.	53
"Hello Dolly" materials with Billy Daniels clippings, 1975.	54
Middle East and Egypt personal photographs.	55
Performance and rehearsal photographs; fan letters; signed photos of Walter Payton and Joe Namath; photographs from White House functions with Fords; letters from Nancy Reagan and Gerald Ford.	56
Georgetown clippings, 1977-1978.	57

Scrapbooks

<i>Pearl's Kitchen</i> -related clippings and materials; letters from Ronald Reagan, Joan Crawford, Kirk Douglass, Dorothy and Lloyd Bridges; Greer Garson, and Senator Fulbright, 1973.	58
Fan mail; letters concerning Middle East trips; letter from Gene Kelly, 1976.	59
"Hello Dolly" finale; fan letters; photos; Fords with Bellson and Omar Sharif.	60
Clippings, obituaries, letter from Irving Berlin, 1978-1979.	61
Photographs: England, Middle East, celebrity friends and families, 1976.	62
Iran photographs, 1973 June.	63
Photographs, including Cab Calloway.	64
Photographs: Mike Douglas, Cab Calloway, Louis Bellson, Pearl Bailey Show, early Pearl, photos from home.	65
Middle East: Iran materials, letters from Iranian Ambassador, photos with King Hussein of Jordan.	66
Personal photos; Talk of the Town (London); performances with celebrity friends (including Jack Benny and Gregory Peck); Liberty Bowl photos.	67
Photographs: Egypt, personal, early.	68
King Hussein visit; personal photos, 1977.	69
Summer of 1973: baseball, Grand Canyon with family, England, 1973.	70
Photos: performances, Jimmy Carter (signed), Gregory Peck, Henry Kissenger, Bob Hope, Gerald Ford, Mike Douglas, the Reagans, Mrs. Bailey.	71

Scrapbooks

Personal/family photographs: Montreal, family gatherings, 1973.	72
Middle East photos and clippings.	73
Young Pearl Bailey photographs, including with Duke Ellington, Louis Bellson, Dean Martin, Bob Hope, James Mason.	74
Georgetown and various other clippings; family photographs; reviews of London engagement, 1980.	75
Letter from Gerald Ford; invitation from Iranian Embassy; clippings about Screen Actors Guild award; United Nations Award; Disneyland trip; invitations; congratulatory telegrams.	76
Various clippings and reviews; Georgetown information; clippings of May Lou Williams; letters from Betty Ford, David Rockefeller, Ambassador of Jordan, Gerald Ford, George Bush.	77
Black address book.	78
Red address book.	79
London and Scotland performances with Duke Ellington; congratulatory telegrams, 1948.	80
"St. Louis Women" review, 1946.	81
Middle East trip photos; England photos, 1979.	82