Orbis YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CATALOG

Search

Author/Creator: Kork, Bobby, compiler.
Title: [Photographs of circus performers and workers].
Production: [United States], [approximately 1944-1954]
Physical Description: 41 photographs : gelatin silver prints ; 26 x 21 cm and smaller

Yale Holdings

Location: BEINECKE (Non-Circulating)
Request for Use in the Beinecke Reading Room

Call Number: YCAL MSS 137
Status: Not Checked Out

Notes: Title devised by cataloger.
Place of creation and date supplied by cataloger.
Associated material: Bobby Kork Photographs, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.
Associated material: Bobby Kork Collection, New York Public Library, New York, New York.
Captions in English.
In 2000, L. Abbott Enterprises divided photographs from the estate of Bobby Kork into eleven lots and auctioned each online individually. The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Cornell University, and the New York Public Library purchased at least one lot each and at least one lot went to private hands. Purchased from L. Abbott Enterprises on the Donald Windham-Sandy Campbell Collection Endowment Fund, 2000.

Access and use: This material is open for research.

Biographical / Historical note: Joseph Robert "Bobby" Kork (1900-1956) of Trenton, New Jersey, was the son of Voytek (also spelled Wojtek) "Walter" Krok (1874-1936) and Mary Annie Krok (1870-1918). The family appeared in vaudeville theater under the billing of "Korking Korkers." Walter Krok and Mary Annie Krok had previously performed respectively as a clown and bareback rider with the Barnum & Bailey Circus; Mary Annie Krok was known as "Marionette, the Girl in White." Bobby Kork's sisters, Mary Krok, Elizabeth Krok, and Anna Krok were dancers in vaudeville theater and Hollywood movies. While "Krok" was the surname used on government and other official documents, family members used "Kork" in performance spaces following their Korking Korkers billing. Bobby Kork had juvenile parts in vaudeville theater, appeared in burlesque theater in the American Circuit, and had parts in musical comedies. By 1920, Kork (then known as Joe Kork) had begun performing as a female impersonator. In the 1930s, he became connected with carnivals, primarily presenting revues and sex attractions, which spotlighted those identifying as either "double sex" or "third sex." He was known primarily for his "Half-and-Half" performances, in which he presented himself as a man on the right side of the body and a woman on the left. He performed, managed, produced, directed, and worked as press agent for circus performances in the United States and Canada.
In 1945, during World War II, Kork performed with an overseas United Service Organizations Inc. (USO) unit. He continued managing and performing on his return to New Jersey in the 1950s. He died on July 20, 1956, at St. Francis Hospital in Trenton following an illness. Collections relating to Bobby Kork at Cornell University and the New York Public Library contain photographs of Kork and male acquaintances in full-length drag, at a gay lounge, in army uniforms

during World War II, in casual home settings, and nude or semi-nude outdoors. These photographs suggest Kork lived as a gay man. While his half-and-half identity was costuming and part of his circus performance, it is unknown whether he was intersex. He did, in some instances, use she/her pronouns when working as a dancer with various performance companies in New Jersey.

Summary: Collection of 41 photographs compiled by Bobby Kork of chiefly unidentified circus performers and workers connected with various circuses, approximately 1944-1954. Includes a disassembled packet of six informal photographs of unidentified men (including a sword swallower who appears in five of the images) and one woman relating to the James E. Strates Shows, approximately 1944; a disassembled spiral-bound packet of eleven informal photographs of unidentified men related to the Thomas Joyland Shows, approximately 1945; and a disassembled packet of seven informal photographs of unidentified men related to Buddy Wagner's Tournament of Thrills, approximately 1953-1954.
Also includes 17 loose photographs relating to Al Wagner's Cavalcade of Amusements, Bailey Bros. Circus, James H. Drew Shows, Johnny J. Jones Exposition, and King Bros. Circus. Identified images include an informal portrait of clown Albert "Flo" White at E. K. Fernandez Circus in Honolulu, Hawaii, December 28, 1948, and a formal signed portrait, inscribed to Kork, of aerialist Billy Barton, 1952. A loose photograph annotated "Ray-Rayette" shows sideshow performers in front of a Bailey Bros. Circus railcar, approximately 1947. Those depicted include "Jelly Roll Rogers and His Minstrels," "Jo-Jo, African pigmy," "Leona" (a snake handler), and Ray-Rayette (a female impersonator).
Other photographs show unidentified circus performers or workers (some in costume). Several photographs in the collection document animals used in the circus including a monkey, donkey, zebra, and snakes.

Format: Visual Material

Cite as: Bobby Kork, Photographs of Circus Performers and Workers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Subjects:
Barton, Billy--Portraits.
Kork, Bobby.
White, Albert (Clown)--Portraits.
Al Wagner's Cavalcade of Amusements.
Bailey Bros. Circus.
E. K. Fernandez Circus.
James E. Strates Shows.
James H. Drew Shows.
Johnny J. Jones Exposition.
King Bros. Circus.
Thomas Joyland Shows.
Carnivals--United States.
Circus--United States.
Circus animals--Pictorial works.
Circus performers--Portraits.
Circus workers--Portraits.
Clowns--Portraits.
Entertainers--United States.
Female impersonators.
Gays.
Gay men.
Intersex people.
Intersexuality.
Minstrel shows.
Pygmies--Portraits.
Sword swallowing--Pictorial works.
Women circus performers--Portraits.

Subjects (Local Yale): LGBTQ resource.

Genre/Form:
Gelatin silver prints.
Photographic prints.
Photographs.

Occupation:
Circus performers 20th century.
Circus workers 20th century.
Entertainers 20th century.

Reparative description: This record was edited in 2023 as part of ongoing revision of outdated or harmful descriptive language in cataloging. Previous versions of this catalog record may be available. For more information, contact the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. 2023-05-12

Link to this page: https://hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/4571168

Search My Searches My List My Account Help Purchase Request Feedback Data Use Accessibility

Yale University Library / Hours

© 2011 Ex Libris Group and Yale University Library. All rights reserved.