

**Hans Spanuth Collection, 1883-1976 [1887-1961]**

**MS 43**

**Box 1-6, 1 Gaylord Folder**

**Abstract:**

Hans August Spanuth (1883-1976) was born in Hamburg and came to America at the age of 6 months when his father, pianist, composer, and music critic August Spanuth, moved the family to New York City when he was offered the job of editor of the *New York Staatszeitung*. Hans attended Columbia University and went on to be a pioneer in moving picture and television production in the United States.

The Hans Spanuth Collection spans 5 regular, archival boxes, on half-size box, and one large Gaylord folder. The collection includes biographical material; business records and correspondence; film and television project production records; photographs; clippings; film reels; and ephemera relating to the life and career of Hans August Spanuth.

**History or Biography:**

Hans August Spanuth (1883-1976) was born in Hamburg and came to America at the age of 6 months when his father, pianist, composer, and music critic August Spanuth, moved the family to New York City when he was offered the job of editor of the *New York Staatszeitung*. Hans attended Columbia University and went on to be a pioneer in moving picture and television production in the United States.

His career in film began in 1907, when he bought a "Nickelodian" kit—a complete motion picture start-up package, including ticket booth, screen, and projector—and began screening films in New York City. In 1911, at 24 years old, Spanuth produced "Oliver Twist," said to be the first feature-length film made in America. This was accomplished by basically filming a theatrical version of the story in its entirety, requiring dramatically more film than was common at the time.

His success in selling state distribution rights for this film gave him the capital to begin larger ventures. After establishing a verbal deal with theater producer Charles Frohman and giving a \$50,000 "good faith" deposit, Spanuth seemed poised to gain access to a great amount of stage talent for his film projects. The death of Mr. Frohman, who was killed in the sinking of the Lusitania, ended this opportunity and prompted Spanuth to move to Chicago to manage the General Film Company branch there.

He had great success with the series "Spanuth's Original Vod-A-Vil Movies," which were short reels of Vaudeville performers, which could be used in theaters that could not afford live entertainment. They were often played as opening acts before a feature would begin.

After his Vod-A-Vil project, he began a decade of work with the Bell & Howell Company to develop and promote one of the earliest 16mm film rental libraries. Spanuth also owned and operated a number of theaters in and around Chicago during this period. He then joined Bertram Willoughby's firm, Ideal Pictures, and worked there for over 8 years. Next, he established Film Studios of Chicago with G.L. Reason, and finally his own firm, The H.A. Spanuth Agency, representing individuals in many film industry positions.

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He is also well-known for his early recognition of the potential of television, at a time when it was considered by many to be inferior to the film world. Starting in 1945, he actively produced and promoted a series of shows for television called, "Woman Speaks." These were composed of vignettes highlighting the accomplishments of women in all aspects of professional life.

Spanuth was a partner or owner in numerous film production and distribution companies over his career, including The General Film Publicity and Sales Company; The Commonwealth Film Corporation; The Central Film Company; and The Community Theaters and Film Company of America.

Hans's father, August Spanuth, performed music around New York for many years, to considerable critical acclaim. He also published songs and scores and reviewed music. According to a donor's note, he was asked to return to Germany during WWI to inspect German prisoner of war camps and kept a daily diary during this time. He died towards the end of the war, with the last entry made on November 9, 1918.

**Description of the Series:**

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There is also considerable material relating to Hans's father, August Spanuth, including biographical items; numerous diaries; clippings; photographs; essays; and sheet music.

The material is arranged into nine series, thematically/chronologically within each series, and chronologically within each folder. Materials are grouped into folders by theme, sometimes with multiple types of materials juxtaposed together, i.e., correspondence and a photograph. This approach was used to keep material from the various film projects unified.

**Provenance:**

The material in the Hans Spanuth Collection was received in at least three separate accessions.

1. Mrs. Jean Jordan of Wilmette, IL. [no date]
2. Mr. Jack T. Beuttas of Warren, PN and Wilmette, IL; August Spanuth WWI Diaries; Aug. 13, 1973.
3. Mr. Archie Motley of the Chicago Historical Society; sheet music and miscellaneous items; Jan. 18, 1975.

**Restrictions:**

None

**Separations:**

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One Keystone Lantern Slide Projector in metal carrying box resides on central, lower shelf of the Special Collections Staff Room.

**Processor:**

Jason Nargis, October-November, 2009

<b><u>Container List</u></b>			
<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>	<b><u>Dates</u></b>
		<b>Hans Spanuth</b>	
1	1	Biographical Materials: Short Biography, Short Autobiography, Portrait Photograph	1949-1954
1	2	Business Contracts/ Stockholder Correspondence	1912-1921
1	3	Business Correspondence	1912-1961
		<b>"Billy Whiskers"</b>	
1	4	Manuscript Drafts for Promotional Posters	c.1920
		<b>"Vod-a-Vil"</b>	
1	5	Clippings	c.1918
1	6	Promotional Flyers	1951
1	7	Negative Can Lists	n.d.
1	8	Vaudeville Act Photographs	n.d.
		<b>"Woman Speaks"</b>	
1	9	Promotional/Production Materials	1945-1948
1	10	Narration Drafts	n.d.
1	11	Stock Shot Sources	1945-1947
1	12	Printing Blocks for Poster	n.d.
		<b>"One Brick Higher"</b>	
1	13	Film Studios Press Book	n.d.
1	14	Purdue University Correspondence	1947-1950
1	15	Sipe Theater Correspondence, Kokomo, IN	1948-1949
2	1	Purdue University Musical Publications	1949-1950
2	2	Scene Photographs, 8"x10"	n.d.
		<b>August Spanuth</b>	
2	3	Biographical Material	1910-1919
2	4	"Programme Music" Essay	n.d.
2	5	Journals—2 Volumes, 4 Glass Lantern Slides	1896-c.1914
2	6	WWI Diary Volume 1; August Spanuth Photograph; Donation note regarding diaries	July 25, 1914-Sept. 22, 1914
2	7	WWI Diary Volume 2	Sept. 23, 1914-Feb. 6, 1915

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2	8	WWI Diary Volume 3	Feb. 7, 1915-June 24, 1915
2	9	WWI Diary Volume 4	June 25, 1915-Dec. 31, 1915
2	10	WWI Diary Volume 5	Jan. 1, 1916-July 7, 1916
3	1	WWI Diary Volume 6	July 7, 1916-Dec. 31, 1916
3	2	WWI Diary Volume 7	Jan. 1, 1917-May 26, 1917
3	3	WWI Diary Volume 8	May 27, 1917-Nov. 9, 1918
3	4	Postcards—4 bundles, 554 cards	c.1910-1920
		<b>Miscellaneous</b>	
3	5	Clippings, Ads, Promotional Material	1920-1964
3	6	Printed Material	1962-1963
3	7	Photographs, Actors, Germany, Bruges	n.d.
		<b>Films</b>	
4	1	Vod-a-Vil #1 Film Reel	n.d.
4	2	Vod-a-Vil #2 Film Reel No.1 and 2	n.d.
4	3	Vod-a-Vil #3 Film Reel	n.d.
5	1	Woman Speaks #10 Film Reel, "Marimba"	n.d.
5	2	Woman Speaks #11 Film Reel, "Roff Sisters"	n.d.
5	3	Woman Speaks #12 Film Reel, "Pianos"	n.d.
6	1	Woman Speaks #1? Film Reel	n.d.
6	2	Gay Nineties/Theodore Roosevelt	n.d.
		<b>Sheet Music</b>	
Gaylord	1	Various Sheet Music Publications, August Spanuth	1884, 1889, 1899, 1905