

Guide to the Nathan Salsbury Papers

YCAL MSS 17



by Bruce P. Stark

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 17

CREATOR: Salsbury, Nathan, 1846-1902

TITLE: Nathan Salsbury papers

DATES: 1860-1965

BULK DATES: 1866-1903

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 4.96 linear feet (6 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence, memorabilia, printed material, writings and photographs on the life and career of Nate Salsbury.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.salsbury>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.salsbury>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Rebecca Salsbury James and Rachel Salsbury Schloss, 1964-67.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 6: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The Nathan Salsbury Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Nathan Salsbury Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Associated Materials

Nathan Salsbury, Objects Associated with Buffalo Bill (WA MSS S-3019), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

NATHAN SALSBUURY (1846-1902)

Nathan Salsbury, son of Nathan and Rebecca Welch Salsbury, was born in Freeport, Illinois. Left an orphan, he lived with his stepfather, Jedutha Fuller. On the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in the ranks of the Union Army. He served in the 89th and 59th Illinois regiments in the Army of the Cumberland and was wounded three times. After discharge Salsbury became an actor and wrote several plays, including "Patchwork" and "On the Trail, or, Money and Misery." In 1875 he organized Salsbury's Troubadours, a successful acting company, and in 1884 joined Buffalo Bill as co-owner of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Eleven years later he established "Black America," an acting, singing, and tumbling extravaganza with a cast of 600 African Americans.

Salsbury married Rachel Samuels, a young actress, in 1887. The couple had four children, one of whom was Rebecca Salsbury James. Nate Salsbury died on December 24, 1902 in Long Branch, New Jersey.

For additional biographical information, see *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. VIII, page 166, and his "Reminiscences" (Box 2, folders 62-63).

SALSBUURY FAMILY

Nathan Salsbury (1780-) m. Lemira Clark (1788-)

Nathan Salsbury (-1847?) m. Rebecca Welch* (-1854?)

Nathan Salsbury (1846-1902) m. 1887 Rachel Samuels (1856-)

Nathan Salsbury (1888-1963)

Milton S. Salsbury (1890-

Rachel Salsbury (1891-) m. William H. Schloss

Rebecca Salsbury (1891-1968) m. 1 Paul Strand (1890-1976) m. 2 William H. James (1899-1962)

Martha Salsbury m. Jedutha Fuller (1812?-

Washington C. Salsbury m. Celestina Rawson

Nathan Rawson Salsbury (1856-) m 1881 Frances A Gibbs (1866-)

Mattie Salsbury m. Akeley

Lemira Salsbury m. 1847 Jessie C. Wells

Note: The first Nathan Salsbury had four other children. *Rebecca Welch later married Jedutha Fuller and after her death Fuller married Martha Salsbury.

Scope and Contents

The Nathan Salsbury Papers contain correspondence, personal papers, photographs, a scrapbook, and memorabilia documenting the life and career of Nate Salsbury, nineteenth-century actor and co-owner of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The papers span the dates 1860-1965, but the bulk of the material covers the years 1866-1903.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), consist of eighteen folders of chronologically arranged correspondence. The two earliest letters were written by Nate Salsbury in 1860-61. In them he alludes to running away from his stepfather and to his interest in joining the circus. These are followed by nine letters from Harriet C. Fuller, Nate's teen-age half-sister, written between 1866-70. Also included in the correspondence are letters from Salsbury relatives and friends which mention his acting career. Some useful information concerning Nate's long association with William F. Cody and the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show can also be found. The collection contains nine letters from Buffalo Bill and additional letters from J. A. Bailey, John M. Burke, Jack Crawford, Jules Keen, and Steele MacKaye concerning the Show. In his reminiscences (Box 2, folder 63), Salsbury stated that when he wrote his famous book, its title was going to be "Sixteen Years in Hell with Buffalo Bill." Cody, was in his opinion, a dishonest drunkard whose only loyalty was to his incompetent cronies. Buffalo Bill's drinking problem is discussed several times throughout the papers. In Cody's first letter to Salsbury, probably written in 1884, he vowed "that after this you will never see me under the influence of liquor," although he added, "I may have to take two or three drinks to day to brace up." In a 1907 letter to Rachel Salsbury, Jack Crawford asserted that Buffalo Bill was "not a Square dealer" and that "Ned Buntline created the most selfish and brutal faker . . . ever perpetrated on the American People." The collection also includes invitations and requests for tickets, most dating from the time of the Wild West Show's tours of Great Britain in 1887 and 1892.

For the period between 1891 and Salsbury's death in December 1902, there is a small series of letters between Salsbury and his wife, Rachel, and sons, Nate, Jr. and Milton. Other correspondents include David J. Burrell, Kate Field, General Nelson A. Miles, Milton E. Milner, Frederic Remington, and Bram Stoker. Correspondence dating from after Salsbury's death discusses the sale of Salsbury's stock in the Buffalo Bill Show, other estate matters, the disposition of artifacts he collected, and reminiscences about Nate Salsbury and Buffalo Bill. In a 1924 letter, for example, Frank Butler, husband of Annie Oakley, refers to Salsbury "as one of the whitest men" he had ever known.

[Series II, Personal Papers](#), are found in Boxes 1-2, folders 19-64. Included are biographical information, memorabilia on Buffalo Bill's Wild West, invitations and programs, printed works, papers on Salsbury's Troubadours, and writings of Nate Salsbury. The Buffalo Bill folders contain copies of the 1887 articles of incorporation, invitations, programs, and schedules. The printed works section offers some useful information on Salsbury's Troubadours and the Wild West Show. A great deal of additional Wild West Show material is found in the scrapbook (Box 5, folder 106). Writings include the original manuscript for an 1871 play, "On the Trail; or, Money and Misery" together with a number of poems, perhaps used in stage performances; an 1865 poem written by Salsbury; and a series of reminiscences written in 1901 or 1902. The reminiscences contain anecdotes and stories of his Civil War experiences, Salsbury's Troubadours, the founding of the Wild West Show, and pungent observations on Buffalo Bill. One Civil War anecdote featuring General William T. Sherman is particularly interesting. Other personal papers include Civil War discharge papers; poetic tributes to Salsbury and Buffalo Bill; recitations dating from Salsbury's acting days; a brochure for "The Reservation," cottages in Long Branch, New Jersey owned and rented by Salsbury; and a posthumous tribute by David J. Burrell.

[Series III, Photographs](#), predominately family and friends are housed in Boxes 2-3, folders 65-89. Many of the pictures of Nate Salsbury and Rachel Samuels Salsbury date from the period when both were on

the stage. In addition, the photographs contain thirty stereoscopic views of the Wild West Show (Box 4, folders 90-97) sold by Underwood & Underwood. A small *Memorabilia* series includes three jubilee coins of Great Britain, two medals, and a paperweight.

The collection concludes with one box of [Oversize](#) papers. The most significant item in the section is a large scrapbook which houses letters, invitations, menus, tickets, Wild West Show memorabilia, newspaper clippings, programs, broadsides, and other like papers. Much of the material found elsewhere in the Salsbury Papers was removed from the scrapbook. The letters include such items as a dinner invitation from Frederic Remington, a short August 1888 letter from Albert Bierstadt, a June 6, 1888 letter from Steele MacKaye congratulating Salsbury on the birth of a son, and an 1888 letter from Henry Watterson on the stationery of the "Headquarters National Democratic Committee." Other items of interest include a May 22, 1873 special order of Abraham Lincoln Post 11 GAR appointing Salsbury one of six company commanders; German, Spanish, and Italian programs for the Wild West Show; publicity for Salsbury's Troubadours; and a December 29, 1865 open letter from Brevet Brigadier General P. Sidney Post to the soldiers of the 59th Regiment of the Illinois Volunteer Infantry congratulating them for their outstanding war service.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1860-66

b. 1, f. 1	Correspondence	1860-66
b. 1, f. 2	Correspondence	1868-69
b. 1, f. 3	Correspondence	1870-78
b. 1, f. 4	Correspondence	1883-86
b. 1, f. 5	Correspondence	1887
b. 1, f. 6	Correspondence	1888-89
b. 1, f. 7	Correspondence	1890-93
b. 1, f. 8	Correspondence	1894-95
b. 1, f. 9	Correspondence	1896
b. 1, f. 10	Correspondence	1897-98
b. 1, f. 11	Correspondence	1899
b. 1, f. 12	Correspondence	1901
b. 1, f. 13	Correspondence	1902-03
b. 1, f. 14	Correspondence	1904-13
b. 1, f. 15	Correspondence	1921-22
b. 1, f. 16	Correspondence	1924-65
b. 1, f. 17-18	C-S, unidentified	n.d.

Series II: Personal Papers, n.d.

b. 1, f. 19	Autograph signatures	n.d.
b. 1, f. 20	Biographical information See also: Oversize, Box 5, folder 102	1881-1936, n.d.
b. 1, f. 21	"Black America:" broadside	n.d.
Buffalo Bill's Wild West		
b. 1, f. 22	Articles of incorporation	1887
b. 1, f. 23	Invitations and tickets	1892-1900, n.d.
b. 1, f. 24	Letterheads	1884-1902, n.d.
b. 1, f. 25	Menus	1887-1902
b. 1, f. 26	Papers	1887, 1899, n.d.
b. 1, f. 27	Programs	1887, 1889, n.d.
b. 1, f. 28	Schedules	1906, n.d.
Civil War		
b. 1, f. 29	Records	1865
b. 1, f. 30	Widow's pension	1909, 1920, n.d.
b. 1, f. 31	Exhibition labels	n.d.
b. 1, f. 32	Invitations and programs	1887
b. 1, f. 33	Invitations, passes, and calling cards	1885-97, n.d.
b. 1, f. 34	Miscellaneous papers	1886, 1896, n.d.
b. 1, f. 35	Menus	n.d.
Organizations		
b. 1, f. 36	89th Illinois Infantry Reunion Association	1886
b. 1, f. 37	The Fellowship Club	1893, n.d.
b. 1, f. 38	Grand Army of the Republic	1869-90, n.d.
b. 1, f. 39	The Lambs	1888-1902, n.d.
b. 1, f. 40	Miscellaneous	1882, 1894, n.d.
b. 1, f. 41	Passenger list for the <i>Ems</i>	1890
Passport See: Oversize, Box 5, folder 103		
b. 2, f. 42	Poetry: tributes to Salsbury and Buffalo Bill	1882-1905

Printed Works

[See also: Oversize, Box 5, folder 104](#)

b. 2, f. 43	Denver Public Library, <i>Western History Collection: Its Beginning and Growth</i>	1950
b. 2, f. 44	James, Rebecca Salsbury, <i>Allow Me to Present</i>	1953
b. 2, f. 45	Miscellaneous papers	n.d.
b. 2, f. 46	Nate Salsbury and the beginnings of musical comedy	1947-48
b. 2, f. 47	"Nate Salsbury and the Wild West Show," <i>Colorado Magazine</i>	1955 Jul
b. 2, f. 48	Newspaper clippings about Buffalo Bill	1939-67
b. 2, f. 49	Newspaper report of volcano eruption on Martinique	1902 May 27
b. 2, f. 50	Program: "Indian Days in Texas"	1939
b. 2, f. 51	Souvenir of the National Frontiersmen's Association	n.d.
b. 2, f. 52	Programs	1887-97, n.d.
b. 2, f. 53	Recitations	n.d.
b. 2, f. 54	The Reservation: brochure	n.d.
b. 2, f. 55	Salsbury family genealogical notes	n.d.
b. 2, f. 56-57	Salsbury's Troubadours See also: Oversize, Box 5, folder 105	1873-87, n.d.
Scrapbook See: Oversize, Box 5, folder 106		
b. 2, f. 58	Sketch in pencil of unidentified man	n.d.
b. 2, f. 59	Tribute: "My Showman Friend" by David James Burrell	1903
Writings		
b. 2, f. 60	Copyright for "The Sanguinary Chasm"	1879
b. 2, f. 61	"On the Trail, or, Money and Misery"	1871
b. 2, f. 62	Poetry: "Veterans Growl"	1865
b. 2, f. 63-64	Reminiscences	ca. 1901

Series III: Photographs, n.d.

b. 2, f. 65	Aurora, Illinois Zouaves	n.d.
b. 2, f. 65	Buffalo Bill and General Nelson Miles	1891
b. 2, f. 66	James, Rebecca Salsbury: includes pictures of Frieda Lawrence, Georgia O'Keeffe, and members of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show	1938
b. 2, f. 67	McHenry, Nellie	n.d.
b. 2, f. 67	Milner, Milton E.	1905, n.d.
b. 2, f. 68	Miscellaneous and unidentified	n.d.
b. 2, f. 69	Rifle belonging to Nate Salsbury	n.d.
b. 2, f. 70-73	Salsbury family	1897, n.d.
b. 3, f. 74	Salsbury, Milton S.	1918, 1921, n.d.
b. 3, f. 75	[Empty folder]	
b. 3, f. 76-82	Salsbury, Nate	1858-1901, n.d.
b. 3, f. 83	Salsbury, Nathan Rawson	n.d.
b. 3, f. 84-89	Salsbury, Rachel Samuels	1879-1915, n.d.
b. 4, f. 90-97	Stereoscopic views: Buffalo Bill's Wild West	n.d.

Series IV: Memorabilia

Numismatic items

b. 4, f. 98	Great Britain: Jubilee three pence, six pence, and sovereign	1887
b. 4, f. 98	Spain: dos centavos	1870
b. 4, f. 98	Aluminum token, one-sided	n.d.
b. 4, f. 99	Medal, brass: Land und Forstwirtschaftliche Ausstellung, Wien	1890
b. 4, f. 100	Medal, white metal: First National Convention of Cattlemen	1884
b. 4, f. 101	Paperweight containing picture of Nate Salsbury	n.d.

Oversize, 1903

b. 5, f. 102	Biographical information: estate administration	1903
b. 5, f. 103	Passport	1891
b. 5, f. 104	Printed works: "Nym Crinkle's Feuilleton"	1887 Feb 12
b. 5, f. 105	Salsbury's Troubadours	n.d.
b. 5, f. 106	Scrapbook	1865-1902

Restricted Fragile Papers

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 6, f. 107	Box 1, folders 7, 8, 20, 21
b. 6, f. 108	Box 2, folders 45, 48, 49, 53

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Musicals
Playwriting
Revues
Wild west shows

Geographic Names

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
-- Anecdotes

Genres / Formats

Photographs -- United States -- 19th century
Reminiscences
Stereographs -- United States -- 19th century
Tintypes (prints) -- United States -- 19th century

Occupations

Actors -- United States -- 19th century
Theatrical managers -- United States -- 19th century

Names

Buffalo Bill, 1846-1917
Fuller, Hattie C.
Salsbury, Nathan, 1846-1902
Salsbury, Rachel Samuels

Families

Salisbury family

Corporate Bodies

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Company
Salsbury's Troubadours