

**THE CENTER FOR POPULAR MUSIC, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY,  
MURFREESBORO, TN**

**“JOHNNY LEIGHMAN’S SUPERIOR MINSTRELS” PAPERS**

**01-012**

**Creator:**

Leighman, Johnny

**Type of Material:**

Correspondence, Newspaper Clippings, Programs, Photographs

**Physical Description:**

.2 linear feet

**Dates:**

1921-1924

**Abstract (Descriptive Summary):**

This collection consists primarily of materials documenting the origin and 1923 tour of the “Johnny Leighman Superior Minstrels.”

**Access/Restrictions:**

The collection is open for research use.

**Provenance and Acquisition Information:**

These materials were compiled by Johnny Leighman (John Leighman Guill) over a four-year period and were originally received loose and in a small scrapbook, which has been disassembled. The collection was purchased by the Center from Ebay in July 1999. At that time, the vendor, Jamie McCauley, said the collection was given to her “by a friend whose father was a black face minstrel known as Johnny Leighman.”

**Subject/Index Terms:**

Minstrel shows

Blackface entertainers

Guill, John Leighman

**Agency History/Biographical Sketch:**

John L. Guill was an aspiring minstrel performer who lived in Quincy, Illinois during the 1920s. He was a member of the Centennial Debating Club of Quincy High School, where he wrote and produced a minstrel show, “The Minstrel’s Return” that debuted December 27, 1921. Correspondence indicates that John Guill (stage name Johnny Leighman) and manager, Max Cohen, assembled a cast and crew and began the Johnny Leighman Superior Minstrels between 1921 and 1923. One 1923 newspaper proclaims Johnny Leighman “the youngest comedian on stage today heading his own company.” The Leighman Minstrels opened for a winter tour at the

Drake Avenue Theatre, September 8, 1923, Centerville, Iowa and was “declared good.” The group then performed September 9 in Oskaloosa, Iowa and September 10 in Ottumwa, Iowa.

Two newspaper clippings indicate that the Leighman Minstrels closed without notice in Ottumwa. Five other venues were listed for the Minstrels’ winter tour, but were cancelled. J. L. Guill explained why the group dissolved in *The Billboard*, November 3, 1923. He concluded that for various reasons the company could not pay expenses, and there were disappointments in band and cast personnel.

**Scope and Content:**

This collection consists primarily of materials documenting the origin and 1923 tour of the “Johnny Leighman Superior Minstrels.” The largest group consists of 1923 correspondence between Johnny Leighman (J. L. Guill) and Max Cohen about organizing, producing, and booking the minstrel troop, along with scattered business records arranged chronologically. There follows a folder of 1923 and undated performance documents and memorabilia, along with pages culled from *The Billboard* (1923-24) related to the troop, some of which Leighman wrote or annotated. Slight newspaper clippings include advertisements and performance venues and programs for Leighman Minstrels, as well as articles and photographs of period minstrel performers. Scattered programs dated 1921 and 1922 from Leighman’s high school minstrel performances are included as well. This collection documents the waning years of minstrel shows.

**Collection Contents (Folder/Box List):**

<u>Box #</u>	<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Description</u>
Box 1		<b>Manuscripts</b>
	Folder 1	Centennial Minstrels: Concert programs, December 1921, 1922; Rehearsal itinerary, December 1921
	Folder 2	Correspondence, August 30, 1921 – September 8, 1923; March 12 and April 1, 1924
	Folder 3	Business receipts, undated; April 4, 1923 – September 9, 1923
	Folder 4	Contracts, May 12, 1923 – September 5, 1923; Advice sheets for performances
	Folder 5	Newspaper clippings (photocopies), September and November 1923
	Folder 6	Ephemera, July 1930; undated
Box 2		<b>Newspaper clippings, <i>The Billboard</i></b>
	Folder 1	Newspaper clippings
	Folder 2	Photocopies of newspaper clippings, December 1921; September 5, 1923 – October 6, 1923; undated
	Folder 3	Photocopies of <i>The Billboard</i> , May 12, 1923 – January 5, 1924
	Folder 4	<i>The Billboard</i> May 12, 1923 – January 5, 1924

**Materials Cataloged Separately:**

Two secular vocal song books were initially part of the collection and have been cataloged in the Rare Books database and housed accordingly; “Lasses White All-Star Minstrels Music Album,”

1922 and “Rusco & Hockwald’s Famous Georgia Minstrels’ Song Album,” 1910. One performance program, “Al. G. Field Minstrels, Empire Theatre, Tuesday, April 11, Quincy,” is cataloged and housed in the Performance Collection.

**Arrangement:**

Unless otherwise noted in the folder and box list, the arrangement scheme for the collection was imposed during processing in the absence of a usable original order.

**Location:**

These materials are located among the manuscripts and found in two boxes by accession number. The two advertising wood blocks are located in Box 1 (Manuscripts). The photograph of William Board Minstrel may be searched in the InMagic database by ID number MAN-PR-00001.

**Related Materials:**

The InMagic database of CPM’s holdings maintains records for other minstrel playbills, programs, and memorabilia.

Processed by Lucinda P. Cockrell, November 2001

Revised by Rachel K. Morris, June 2011