



Finding Aid for

**EARL NEWBERRY PAPERS, 1921-1965
ACCESSION 2002.35**

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**ACCESSION # 2002.35
Earl Newberry Papers
1921-1965**

Approximately 6 Cubic Feet

Acquisition: The collection was donated to Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village.
Access: The collection is open to research.
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INTRODUCTION

Earl Newberry (1894-1961) had a variety of careers during his life. He is best known as a promoter of theatrical shows, musical acts and auto thrill shows in the years before and after World War II. He was born in Chicago, but the Newberry family was originally from Detroit. He began his music career as a pianist for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in the 1920s, then worked as director of several military marching bands in the 1930s. He departed from military bands in the 1930s and moved into promoting theatrical acts such as dancing girl revues and musicians in the early 1940s. Victor Borge, the “clown prince” of Denmark, was among the noted acts that Newberry booked during his career. Much of these business dealings were done under the business enterprise Associated Artists, Inc.

Earl Newberry’s next venture was in auto thrill shows, for which he is most well known. He worked as tour director for the Jimmie Lynch Death Dodgers, which began in 1935. Jimmie Lynch was from Texas, and started out testing automobiles, tires and gasoline in Texas for safety in automobile crashes. These tests became such spectacles that Lynch turned them into public exhibitions, touring throughout Texas and the southwest, as well as the Midwest. The Jimmie Lynch Death Dodgers were featured in the 1939 New York City World’s Fair due to their rising popularity. Newberry was manager of the Jimmie Lynch Death Dodgers, and then purchased the show outright from Mr. Lynch. It is not known exactly when Newberry became involved with Jimmie Lynch.

Auto thrill shows were immensely popular until World War II. Gasoline rations and automobile production forced auto thrill shows to take a hiatus, in addition to the fact that many of the shows’ drivers volunteered or were drafted for service. After the war ended, auto thrill shows quickly regained their pre-war popularity. As evidence of their popularity, Clark Gable starred in the 1950 film “To Please A Lady”, in which he plays a thrill-chasing race driver who gets “busted down” to being a stunt driver in an auto thrill show. The film features the Joie Chitwood Auto Daredevils, one of the shows Newberry promoted.

These shows were also becoming popular in Europe after the war. Newberry promoted several events in Europe, such as the Cytrix Motorcycle Daredevils in England. Some of these events were promoted along with Abe Saperstein, owner and manager of the Harlem Globetrotters. Featured in the collection is correspondence with Tex Bryant, an American serviceman stationed in France, who sent Newberry photos of auto stunts being performed in France.

Newberry operated many of his business enterprises, such as the Jimmie Lynch Death Dodger and the Joie Chitwood Auto Daredevils, under the name of the shows until forming Newberry Thrill Enterprises in 1954. Among the correspondents in Newberry’s letters is Leo Overland, who was the Executive Vice President of Newberry Thrill Enterprises, Inc.

Other business ventures Newberry was associated with include: the Tournament of Thrills, Hollywood Trans-World Auto Daredevils and the Cytrix Motorcycle Daredevils from England.

In addition, Earl Newberry also served as zone supervisor for the International Stuntmen's Association and was a consultant for Ford Motor Company, staging shows and supervising motion pictures for the company.

In the fall of 1960, and again in 1961, Newberry became ill and was hospitalized. It was discovered that he was suffering from colon cancer. It is believed that Newberry died during some form of exploratory surgery for his cancer. He died around late October-early November 1961.

Earl Newberry had one daughter during his life, but it was not with Irene Newberry. It is not known when his daughter was born, or how much contact he had with her.

Irene Newberry, whose maiden name was Tendzi, was born in the Midwest in 1904. She went to college in Milwaukee and became a commercial artist. She created artwork for many of the shows her husband promoted. She also created posters on automobile safety, one of which is included in this collection. She also sketched and painted portraits of her husband, which are also part of this collection.

Earl and Irene Newberry were married in 1936-37 in Tampa, Florida, then relocated to Jacksonville in 1938. They maintained a residence there all throughout their marriage. Irene Newberry lived in their Jacksonville home until her death in 2000 at the age of 94. She also took over some of the business responsibilities for Newberry Thrill Enterprises after this death.

Earl Newberry was also a Mason and belonged to the Lodge in St. Louis, as did his father (John Phelps) and brother (William H.).

Unrelated to the life of Earl and Irene Newberry, but of noteworthy interest, are writings by Dr. George Crane on sex, relationships, marriage and etiquette that reflect both conventional and unconventional views on these topics for the time period.

This collection was donated to the Museum by Jim Johnson. Additional background information was provided by Jim Johnson and Ms. Adelaine Houghton, Irene Newberry's sister.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Earl Newberry Collection consists of business records for his various enterprises, correspondences, newspaper clippings, magazines and publications relating to auto thrill shows, racing and fairs. There are also several audio recordings of radio advertisements for auto thrill shows in 33 1/3 RPM format.

A large portion of the collection is photographs representing Newberry's many different careers in show business. This includes photographs of military marching bands, dancing girl revues, and photographs of individual drivers and cars taken at some of the auto thrill shows he promoted, which are arranged by the show title. The collection also features assorted personal photographs of Earl Newberry, photographs from other thrill shows featuring human torpedoes, motorcycles, helicopters and other aircraft.

The Newberry collection is divided into four series:

- Earl Newberry (Personal and business papers, photographs)
- Irene Newberry (Personal and business papers, sketches and paintings)
- Thrill Shows, Fairs and Speedways (publications relating to these topics)
- Photographs, Misc. Artwork

Series I
Earl Newberry

This series contains letters, business papers, photographs, artwork and assorted memorabilia relating to Newberry's business enterprises. Most of the photographs and some of the business papers are organized by name of the particular auto thrill show with which Newberry was involved. The business papers focus only on his years with Associated Artists (1942-43), and with Newberry Enterprises (1954-57). His letters between himself and business associates cover the years 1942-43 and 1960-61. Also of interest are audio recordings of radio advertisements for some of his auto thrill shows.

There are also newspaper clippings and photographs featuring Newberry, information on his funeral services and assorted memorabilia he had accumulated. The series also contains genealogical notes on the Newberry family, believed to have been written by Earl Newberry.

BOX 1

Address book
Associated Artists
 Business papers, 1942-3
Assorted memorabilia belonging to Earl Newberry
Correspondence
 Earl Newberry
 1942-3
 1960
 1961
Funeral arrangements of Earl Newberry
Genealogical notes on Newberry family
Hollywood Trans-World Auto Daredevils
 Photographs of cars in Trans-world shows
Jimmie Lynch Death Dodgers
 Business papers, 1934-1952
 Photographs of cars in shows
Sound recording

BOX 4

(size BB)

Radio advertisement - Jimmie Lynch Death Dodgers, 1949
33 1/3 RPM (lateral cut) (3)
Radio advertisement for Jimmie Lynch Thrill Circus, 1949
33 1/3 RPM (long play) (3)
CD copies of above radio ads

BOX 1

Joie Chitwood Auto Daredevils
 Business papers, 1951-52
 Photographs of cars in Joie Chitwood shows
Poster advertisement, (b&w)

BOX 5

(size C)

BOX 6

(size F)

Poster advertisement, (b&w, color)
Poster advertisement, (color)

BOX 4
(size BB)

Poster advertisement, (color)

BOX 2

Newberry Thrill Enterprises
Blank contracts, forms
Business papers, 1954-61
Cash book, 1959
Cytrix Motorcycle Daredevils (rosters and schedules)
Leo Overland (Executive V.P.)
Correspondence
Rosters and schedules
Newspaper clippings related to Earl Newberry
Photographs of Earl Newberry
Receipts of Earl & Irene Newberry
Tournament of Thrills
Photographs of cars in Tournament of Thrills shows
Felt flag

BOX 7
(size F)

Series II
Irene Newberry

This series contain letters, cards, artwork and various writings by Mrs. Newberry. Mrs. Newberry, a commercial artist who created promotional artwork for her husband, took over some of his responsibilities for Newberry Thrill Enterprises after his death. The artwork includes two sketches and a portrait of her husband, and some assorted pieces she sketched.

BOX 2

Correspondence and personal papers
Dr. George Crane writings on relationships, sex, psychology

BOX 5
(size C)

Portrait of Earl Newberry by Irene Newberry
Poster sketch, "We who sell liquor, wine, beer..."
Poster sketch, "The Words of Lincoln" by Irene Newberry
Sketch of Earl Newberry by Irene Newberry (charcoal)
Sketch of Earl Newberry by Irene Newberry (charcoal)
Floral Print

Series III
Thrill Shows, Fairs & Speedways

Contained in this series are newspaper clippings, programs from some of Newberry's auto thrill shows and copies of publications relating to auto thrill shows, auto racing and fairs. This series features an extensive run of the weekly newspaper Illustrated Speedway News from 1951-52.

BOX 2

Amusement Business 1961-65 (magazine)
Amusement Business 1965 (catalog)
Auto thrill show programs

- BOX 4** Cavalcade of Fairs 1965 (catalog)
(size BB)
- BOX 7** Checkered flag
- BOX 4** Illustrated Speedway News (weekly publication), 1951-1952
(size BB)
- BOX 3** NASCAR Newsletter and cars in general
Newspaper clippings related to auto thrill shows
Publications relating to fairs
“To Please A Lady” advertising information
Trucker’s Dispatch (magazine)

Series IV
Photographs, Misc. artwork

Photographs in this series reflect Newberry’s various careers and personal interests. There are photographs of Newberry with military marching bands that he directed and pictures of various musicians, as well as pictures from his dancing girl revues. Also featured are photographs of assorted cars performing stunts, motorcycles, airplanes that were used in stunts, races and pictures of clowns performing during auto thrill shows. There are also photographs of various people with whom Newberry was associated.

Also in this series are misc. painting and artwork belonging to the Newberry family. These items are not attributed by Mrs. Newberry.

- BOX 3** Cars
Early model cars
Mid model cars
Late model cars
- Clowns
Dancing Girl Revues
Drivers, Performers (Photographs of drivers in auto thrill shows and performers in other shows.)
Human torpedoes, hot air balloon
Marching Bands, Musicians
Misc. photographs
- BOX 3** Motorcycles
People
Planes, helicopters
- BOX 6** Painting by Ted Kantzky
(size F)
- BOX 3** Pomona Fair, 1950
- BOX 6** Reproduction of Grant Wood painting
(size F)