THE GRIFFIN COLLECTION

An Inventory of the Materials in the Rochester Museum and Science Center

Prepared by:
Colleen R. McBride, Graduate Intern
SUNY Brockport
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Background/Introduction to Chronology

The Griffin Theatrical Shoe Company was a shoe manufacturer specializing in performance/circus-art footwear. Judging from the foot patterns included in many of the letter, the company custom tailored every individual order. They would also dye shoes to match specifications and material swatches that were also found throughout the collection. The company existed, in some fashion, from the early 1900's through the 1970's. The only documentation of the company and the Griffin family found were the Rochester City and Suburban Directories and the census.

James R. Griffin came to the United States c. 1873. He worked as a shoemaker in the city of Rochester from the time of his arrival. James then began to operate his own company out of his home shortly after along with his sons.

The company and James R. Griffin cannot be found between the years 1925 and 1934 (presumably James has died). This is the only gap in the chronology. The business is then taken on by James' middle son, Raymond.

The following time-line provides a rough sketch of the company and the Griffin family. In hopes of finding and interviewing family members currently living, an attempt was made to trace Raymond's daughters to the present. Unfortunately, all connections to the family were lost, the most recent date being 1975.

All information regarding the people in the time-line as well as the company was derived from the Rochester City and Suburban Directories (1873-1975), as well as the 1915 and 1925 New York State Census. Unless otherwise indicated, the directories were the sources used.
c. 1854  James R. Griffin born in England

1873  First listing for James R. Griffin—shoemaker—boards at 9 Spring Street. (**also first year in the United States)

c. 1887  Herbert J. Griffin born

c. 1897  Raymond A. Griffin born

c. 1899  Adrian J. Griffin born

1904  James Griffin listed as shoemaker at 25 Spring Street, house at corner of Thurston and Magnolia.

*after 1904 he is just listed as living and working on Magnolia Street.

1909  listed at 141 W. Magnolia—"Theatrical Shoe Company"—house same

1915 directory  listed on Milton Street as shoe manufacturer

1915 New York State Census  141 Milton Street—James R. Griffin—61 year old white male, native of England, been in U.S. for 42 years—is a citizen. Has three sons at home—1—Herbert J. Griffin, 28 years old, also a shoe manufacturer. 2—Raymond A Griffin, 18 years old, student. 3—Adrian J. Griffin, 16 years old, also a student.

1917-1918  "Theatrical Shoe Company"—141 Milton Street, James R., Herbert J., and Raymond A. (house same)

1921-1922  "Theatrical Shoe Company"—at 121 Milton Street, Herbert J., Adrian J. and James R.

Raymond Griffin is listed as opr Mill ft Factory (house at Irondequoit).
1924-1925
James R. Griffin and the "Theatrical Shoe Company" not listed
Adrian J. Griffin-auto mechanic
Herbert J. and Raymond A.-not found

1925 New York State Census
Raymond A. Griffin--28 years old, occupation sta engineer.
Lives at Bay Front, Irondequoit. Wife--Bernice (in directory later she is listed as Beatrice), 26 years old, is a housekeeper. Two daughters, Dolores and Marjorie.

1934
Raymond A. Griffin--628 Seneca Road, Irondequoit

1944
Marjorie F. Griffin marries Merton Ackerman. Occupation at USA, house at 85 Elmdorf Avenue--this address stays the same.

1945
Raymond A. Griffin listed in suburban directory at 628 Seneca Road, Irondequoit as a shoemaker.
listed in the city directory as a manufacturing agents at "Esser and Griffin"-107 N. Water Street.
Daughter Dolores-stenographer, living at home


1946
Raymond A. Griffin-shoe manufacturer, 628 Seneca Road-"Esser and Griffin" no longer listed.

Merton Ackerman(Marjorie) is a furniture director at AVUS Furniture Co.
1947  Dolores is no longer in the suburban directory—listed in the city directory as a student living at 6 Vine Street

1951  Last listing for Dolores Griffin (student, 6 Vine Street).

--Marjorie Ackerman's name changes to Marguerite--

1954  Merton Ackerman (Marguerite) listed as a building contractor.

1958  Raymond A. Griffin - first listing in the business section of the suburban directory as shoe manufacturer-628 Seneca Road (Rochester, 22, Irondequoit—*the number 22 denotes post office-Irondequoit mail sent through Rochester)

1970  Merton Ackerman (Marguerite) listed as a sales rep. "Machinery Sls"

1973  Directory lists Ackerman, Marguerite as widow of Merton Ackerman.

1974–75  Marguerite Ackerman no longer listed.

1975  Final listing for Raymond A. Griffin, his company and Beatrice, his wife.
SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists mainly of letters, the bulk of which are still in envelopes, placing orders for circus/theatrical shoes. There are also some receipts, telegrams, invoices, etc., all pertaining to the shoe company and its business. The dates of correspondence range from August 3, 1916 through February 10, 1965, most dating between 1960 and 1965. The collection contains approximately 600 to 700 letters total. Upon receiving the collection and examining its contents five bundled sets of letters were found arranged in a generally descending order (based on the month/day of postage stamp—most recent in front). The rest were loose in the box but displayed same order. It was assumed that all the letters were once organized in this fashion, so they were returned to this order. Many of the letters display unique graphics advertising performance groups, families, circuses and individuals (see enclosed samples).

***There is one bundle of letters wrapped in plastic and boxed because of mold. Needs to be checked by a conservator.***

***All should eventually be inspected by conservator for dirt and mold***
CONTENTS OF COLLECTION

I. Envelopes

1--Early Correspondence---1916/1917
Letters addressed to Jas. R. Griffin at 141 Milton Street
Rochester, New York
10 letters total dated August 3, 1916-October 20, 1917.
Letters are in fair condition—there is some creasing from being
folded, some amount of water "staining" and ink bleeding, small
tears—no envelopes.

2--Correspondence---undated
Two letters have pre-printed stationary reading 19
Two letters have material swatches stapled to corners
Some creasing, discoloration. Slight tears at edges.
Postcard—can't read date-196?
Receipt (discolored)

3--Route Card-1939
Tidemarks on left edge and right side—For "Parker and Watts"
circus route

4--Route Cards-1961-1963
Found in brown paper bag labeled "Route Cards 1961-63"--bag is
torn and crumpled. 25 Route Cards total
Tidemarks on several—larger ones creased but all in good condition.

5--Route Cards—undated
"Al G. Kelly + Miller Bros. Circus" faded with tidemarks—in fair
condition.
other two cards both from "Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus"—good
condition.

6--1 Sealed Envelope
There is correspondence inside-return address is "Napoleone
Zamperla and Family"—rest of envelope blank/not addressed to
anyone. Envelope is in good condition—some discoloration and dirt

7--Misc. Addresses
4 pieces total—addresses written on small torn pieces of paper—good
condition, some smudge marks.

8--Receipts—-not dated
2 check receipts from Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Inc. Good Condition, small amount of staining-dirt on back/edge

9—Correspondence-1959

1 envelope and letter dated October 20, 1959. Right corner torn away, small amount of dirt and staining-good condition.

10—Loose Stamps

11—Correspondence-1965


12—Correspondence-1960


II. Boxes

Box # 1—Correspondence 1961

Bulk is letters and envelopes. Some receipts, telegrams and postcards, cardboard outline of foot. All in fair condition. Envelopes torn where opened. There is dirt and mold and some amount of tidemarks. Dated January 4, 1961-December 13, 1961.

Box # 2—Correspondence 1962

Bulk is letters and envelopes. Some receipts, telegrams and postcards. Some letters are very fragile due to being wet, then drying. Some dirt and mold. Envelopes torn where opened. Dated January 8, 1962-December 31, 1962.

Box # 3—Correspondence 1963

Bulk is letters and envelopes. Invoices and receipts for the year are also included. Dates range from January 2, 1963-December 30, 1963.

Box # 4—Correspondence 1964

Bulk is letters and envelopes, some telegrams. Envelopes torn where opened. Dates range from January 23, 1964-December 29, 1964.