

# EMPIRE REAL ESTATE AND THEATRE COMPANY, GLENS FALLS: A Guide to the Collection

## OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS

- Repository:** Crandall Public Library.  
Folklife Center  
Glens Falls, NY.
- Creator:** Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company (Glens Falls, N.Y.)
- Title:** Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company Records
- Dates:** 1895 –1908.
- Abstract:** The records consist of correspondence, financial papers, contracts, and related files kept by James A. Holden (1861-1918) while he was theater manager. Much of the correspondence concerns booking of various stage shows, vaudeville acts, other musical productions, comedies, romance, historical dramas, farce, melodrama, minstrel shows, concerts, and motion pictures for Empire Theatre.
- Quantity:** 2.5 cubic feet (8 boxes)
- Identification Number:** Archives & Manuscripts: Businesses

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Empire Theatre opened on South Street, Glens Falls, N.Y. on October 5, 1899. Addison B. Colvin was the first president and the general manager of the Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company through 1913. James A. Holden (1861-1918) was one of the original stockholders of the Empire Theatre and served at times as its manager, secretary, and treasurer. Holden was active in the business affairs of Glens Falls, along with various civic and cultural associations in the area throughout much of his life. Also known for his interest in local and regional history, Holden was New York State Historian from 1911 to 1916.

The Empire Theatre was owned by the Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company. The building was designed by the architect J. B McElphattrick. When it opened in 1899, the three-story building housed an auditorium, a banquet room, kitchen, card rooms, parlors, toilette rooms, and a ballroom. The stage curtain depicted "Sappho and her

friends.” The first play staged in the theater was “Way Down East.” For many years the Empire Theatre was a successful venue for vaudeville, theatrical productions, and musical performance.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theater competed with local movie houses to show moving pictures, but by the 1940’s it was losing money. When the building came up for public auction on July 18, 1946 there were no bidders and the title passed to Judge McPhillips, who held a second mortgage on the property. Empire Theatre was remodeled as an office building in 1950.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE RECORDS**

The records consist of correspondence of James A. Holden, much of it concerning the booking of various stage shows, including vaudeville acts, other musical productions, comedies, romance, historical dramas, farce, melodrama, minstrel shows, concerts, and “moving pictures.” The main booking agent used by Holden was Julius Cahn of Cahn and Grant: New England Chain of Theatres. Some shows were booked through Klaw and Erlanger. Other booking agents were occasionally used and some shows were booked directly without agents. Holden’s letters sometimes describe theater profits and financial agreements with agents. Addison B. Colvin, President of Empire Theatre, is mentioned occasionally in the correspondence.

Some correspondence concerns purchase of equipment and supplies for the building. Included in the correspondence series are some financial receipts and contracts for shows, advertising and printing expenses, and ticket orders. Also present are financial records, especially receipts, along with a bound volume of contracts for shows.

## **PROVENANCE**

The bulk of the collection came to Crandall Library in 1986 as a gift of Charles H. Kaulfuss. The papers had belonged to his grandfather, Peter Kaulfuss, who bought the Empire Billiard Room in the early 1900s. The Empire Billiard Room was located in basement level of the Empire Theater building. Additional materials were donated by William J. Gordon in 2014.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE RECORDS**

Records are organized into three series:

I. Correspondence, arranged alphabetically by surname or name of organization. The Gordon donation consists of 2 boxes, temporarily numbered 4A and 4B. 4A is sorted and foldered correspondence (to be interfiled in correspondence boxes). 4B is

unsorted correspondence plus one folder of various: ads, programs, etc. which also needs to be interfiled with previous collection.

II. Financial Records: receipts.

III. Contracts for shows (bound volume).

## INDEX TERMS

- Topics:** Minstrel shows—New York (State)—Glens Falls.  
Motion picture theaters—New York (State)—Glens Falls—  
History.  
Motion pictures—New York (State)—Glens Falls—History.  
Musical theater—New York (State)—Glens Falls.  
Performing arts—New York (State)—Glens Falls.  
Theaters—New York (State)—Glens Falls—History.  
Vaudeville—New York (State)—Glens Falls.
- Places:** Glens Falls (N.Y.)—Commerce.
- Organizations:** Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company (Glens Falls,  
N.Y.)  
Klaw & Erlanger.
- Important People:** Cahn, Julius.  
Colvin, Addison Beecher, 1858-1939.  
Holden, James A. (James Austin), 1861-1918.

## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- Preferred Citation:** Empire Real Estate and Theatre Company Records,  
Folklife Center  
Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, NY.
- Accession Information:** Accession no. 1986-002.  
Gift of Charles H. Kaulfuss, 1986; additional material gift of  
William J. Gordon, 2014.
- Processing Information:** Partially processed  
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