

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

**BILLY CARTER MINSTREL SCRAPBOOK**

**97-036**

**Creator:**

Carter, Billy

**Type of Material:**

Scrapbook, including Manuscripts, Newspaper Clippings, Performance Documents, Photographs

**Physical Description:**

1 scrapbook (1 linear foot)

**Dates:**

1863-1904

**Abstract (Descriptive Summary):**

This scrapbook documents the career of Billy Carter, a banjo minstrel performer whose career survived through the twilight of minstrelsy. The scrapbook includes numerous newspaper clippings, photographs and representations, and performance documents, as well as contracts from several cities and theaters and broadside and leaflet playbills.

**Access/Restrictions:**

The collection is open for research use.

**Provenance and Acquisition Information:**

This scrapbook was primarily assembled by Billy Carter himself. The scrapbook was purchased by Center for Popular Music in December 1997 from Savoy Books.

**Subject/Index Terms:**

Carter, Billy  
Minstrel music  
Minstrel shows  
Blackface entertainers

**Agency History/Biographical Sketch:**

Billy Carter was born in New Orleans in 1834. His first major engagement was with the Louisiana Minstrels in the mid-1860s. He migrated north, and beginning in Pennsylvania and thence to New York, he established himself as one of the most popular acts on the northeastern minstrel circuit. Billed as the "King of the Banjo Players," he was one of the chief players of the period, known for his challenges to the public with a \$500 wager that he could not be outdone on the instrument. In addition to his solo career, he played with the leading troupes of the day, including Hooley's Minstrels, Harrigan & Hart, and Tony Pastor; his career survived the twilight of minstrelsy, and he continued into vaudeville until a few years before his death in 1912.

**Scope and Content:**

Clipped reviews; clipped humorous sketches, jokes, and cartoons; contracts; prints; memorabilia; and twenty-eight programs and playbills documenting Carter's career as a banjo minstrel performer. Highlights of the scrapbook include ten (10) engagement contracts signed by Carter, mostly from the 1870s, representing theaters and agents in New Orleans, Baltimore, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, and Boston; twenty-four (24) broadside and leaflet minstrel and variety playbills, including two on satin; several representations of Carter, including a clipped color lithograph blackface portrait, a woodcut full portrait as appearing on the detached and mounted cover of Carter's banjo songster, a half-tone portrait, and an albumen photograph half-length; a letter to Carter informing him of the birth of his daughter; and a telegram sent at the time of his death. There are numerous clippings, many of which are reviews mentioning Carter's performance; also many comic sketches, jokes, and cartoons; and sentimental, religious, and patriotic pictures.

**Arrangement:**

The original arrangement of the scrapbook was maintained during processing, unless otherwise described in the below note about provenance and arrangement.

The photographs were taken and the notebook compiled and arranged by Center staff. Preservation efforts and presentation of the scrapbook itself were done by a student worker under the supervision of CPM's archivist.

**Location:**

This scrapbook is located among other manuscripts collections, filed by accession number.

**Related Materials:**

The InMagic database of CPM's holdings maintains records for other minstrel playbills, photographs, programs, and memorabilia. The *Apollo Club Minstrels Scrapbook*, governed by the same accession number, is also an important collection of minstrel performances.

**Notes:***About Provenance and Arrangement*

For documentation of the original arrangement of the scrapbook, please see the black notebook marked "BILLY CARTER'S SCRAPBOOK --PHOTOGRAPHS" which is available for reference upon request. The black and white photographs in that collection document all the material contents of the scrapbook as CPM had received it from the dealer.

The current century-box contains all the items from the original scrapbook. Pieces that were large have been moved to oversize boxes and drawers, and photocopies placed therein. Original pages with any writing on them have been kept and placed in the back. These original pages were photocopied and used as the base sheet for the items they had presented. Most of the original

pages were crowded within the items, and for viewing ease, have been separated slightly from one another.

A notebook that documents the *Billy Carter Minstrel Scrapbook* was kept and documents the condition and arrangement in which the scrapbook was received. The photographic images are meant only to provide a record of the arrangement of the materials, not for the purpose of preservation of their content. Efforts will be made to microfilm the notebook for its contents.

In most cases, it is assumed that Carter himself had assembled and placed all the materials found in the scrapbook, but who placed the telegram announcing his death and the obituary in the scrapbook remains unknown, nor is it certain that other things regarding Carter were not placed in the scrapbook by someone other than him.

Many of the large playbills and programs that are housed in oversize boxes in the Center's holdings were folded up and stuffed under the front cover of the scrapbook. Other materials were inserted among the pages. Center staff has tried to photograph each of these loose materials in the place where they were found. In most cases, staff could not fit the whole article in the camera's frame, so staff has tried to record a piece of the content that would identify the article from the others. The Center chose to use black and white print film to document the scrapbook's arrangement, but the color slides at the end of the notebook were meant to provide some indication as to how the colorful images in the notebook looked *in situ*.

Processed by David M. Jellema, Paul Wells, Regina Forsythe, and Rebecca Watrous, June 1999  
Revised by Rachel K. Morris, July 2011