



## Donn Arden Photographs

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
<b>Creator:</b>	Craig, Walter
<b>Title:</b>	Donn Arden Photographs
<b>ID:</b>	PH-00328
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	approximately 1920 to 1989
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2.50 Cubic Feet (30 hanging folders, 1 shared box of negatives, 1 shared binder of slides, and 1 flat file)
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3.20 Linear Feet
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Donn Arden Photographs (approximately 1920-1989) contain photographs, negatives, and photographic slides of dancer and choreographer Donn Arden. The photographs primarily document Arden's life as a dancer and choreographer in Las Vegas, Nevada and in Paris, France, including performances at the Stardust Hotel, Desert Inn, and MGM Grand in Las Vegas and the Lido in Paris. The photographs also depict rehearsals, dancers, showgirls, Arden's friends and family, and performance locations.

### Preferred Citation

Donn Arden Photographs, approximately 1920-1989. PH-00328. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Biographical Note

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Choreographer, producer, and director Donn Arden was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1915 as Arden Carlyle Peterson. He began dancing at an early age. As a young boy, he took dance lessons from St. Louis theatre director Robert Alton, who would go on to become one of Hollywood's most noted choreographers for shows including *Pal Joey*, *Showboat*, and *Easter Parade*. He would remain Arden's primary inspiration throughout his career. Shortly after high school, Arden Peterson changed his name to Donn Arden. In the early 1930s, young Arden danced by himself in

a number of shows in the Midwest but was advised by his agent to add female dancers to his act; he started with four, then six, and eventually ended up with twelve. Arden easily fell into doing the choreography, producing, and directing work. By the end of the decade, his success in staging shows led him to stop dancing altogether and at one point he had put together house chorus lines for twelve theaters across the United States.

Arden spent much of World War II staging shows for American troops and following the war he stayed in Paris. In 1947, he began his long and successful collaboration at the Lido cabaret with producers Pierre-Louis Guerin and Rene Fraday. Buoyed by his trademark American tempo and spice, the Lido shows were successful, and Arden would be associated with them for the remainder of his life. It was during his work at the Paris Lido that Arden also met the woman who would become his lifelong friend and collaborator, Margaret Kelly. Known dancers over the years as "Miss Bluebell", only girls who fit her exacting dancing and height requirements were admitted to the ranks of the world-famous "Bluebell Girls."

The 1950s and 1960s, Arden frequently traveled between coasts and continents to check on shows he had running concurrently in Paris, France; New York City, New York; New Jersey; Miami, Florida; Los Angeles, California; and Las Vegas, Nevada. In New York and Miami, his work was featured at the Latin Quarter nightclub and in Los Angeles at the Moulin Rouge. It was during this time that Arden worked closely with producer Frank Sennes both at the Moulin Rouge and the Desert Inn Hotel in Las Vegas.

In the early 1950s, Arden partnered with fellow dancer and choreographer Ron Fletcher and together they created the Arden-Fletcher Dancers who graced a number of Desert Inn, Moulin Rouge, and Latin Quarter productions. After he ended his partnership with Fletcher, Arden directed his distinctive "Donn Arden Dancers" at the Desert Inn who danced behind the headliner of the moment, be it Betty Hutton, Danny Kaye, Jack Benny, or Betty Grable. These early shows differed from the extravagance of later years as they generally featured lines of girls exquisitely costumed and gracefully elegant, but without the special effects that would characterize his later work.

In 1958, in collaboration with Sennes and the Paris Lido, Arden brought his Paris Lido show to the newly opened Stardust Hotel and Casino on the north end of the Las Vegas Strip. The topless showgirls were a sensation and the show went through eleven successful editions until it closed in 1991. Arden's other Las Vegas spectacles included *Hello America*, a wholesome tribute to America that received accolades in the Congressional Record for its positive portrayal of the United States, and the dynamic *Pzazz! 68* and *Pzazz! 70*. In the 1970s, Arden brought his talents to the MGM Grand Hotels, producing his long-running tributes to classic Hollywood: *Hallelujah Hollywood* and *Hello Hollywood Hello* in Las Vegas and Reno respectively. The two shows combined ran almost seventeen years.

In November 1980, Arden was two weeks from opening his newest creation, *Jubilee!*, when fire swept through the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas killing eighty-five people and destroying all of the sets and costumes for the show. Despite this setback, *Jubilee!*, with its sinking Titanic and collapsing Samson's temple, opened in July 1981 and ran until February 2016.

Arden died in November 1994. At his death, the lights on the Las Vegas Strip were dimmed.

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## Scope and Contents Note

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The Donn Arden Photographs (approximately 1920-1989) contain photographs, negatives, and photographic slides of dancer and choreographer Donn Arden. The photographs primarily document Arden's life as a dancer and choreographer in Las Vegas, Nevada and in Paris, France, including performances at the Stardust Hotel, Desert Inn, and MGM Grand in Las Vegas and the Lido in Paris. The photographs also depict rehearsals, dancers, showgirls, Arden's friends and family, and performance locations.

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## Arrangement

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Materials are organized into three series:

Series I. Performance photographs, approximately 1930-1989;

Series II. Rehearsal and backstage photographs, approximately 1930-1989;

Series III. Personal and family photographs, approximately 1920-1989.

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## Administrative Information

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### Access Note

Collection is open for research.

### Publication Rights

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### Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 2001 by Walter Craig; accession number 2001-005.

## Processing Note

Materials were processed by Special Collections staff. The materials were arranged and described in 2017 by Lindsay Oden.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

The following resources may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:

Donn Arden Papers, 1918-1994. MS-00425. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ffolliott "Fluff" LeCoque Papers, 1879-2015. MS-00826. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Valda and Esper Esau Collection on Lido de Paris, 1958-1991. MS-00520. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Names and Subjects

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- Las Vegas (Nev.)
- Dancers
- Choreography
- Choreographers
- Entertainment
- photographs
- Hello, Hollywood, Hello!
- Entertainers
- Showgirls
- Showgirls -- Nevada -- Reno
- Showgirls -- Las Vegas (Nev.)
- Revues -- Nevada -- Reno
- Revues -- Nevada -- Las Vegas
- Revues -- France -- Paris
- Theatrical producers and directors

- Arden, Donn, 1917-1994
- Kelly, Margaret, 1910-2004
- Hello America (Las Vegas, Nevada)

## Collection Inventory

### Performance photographs, approximately approximately 1930-1989

Physical Description: 3.2 Linear Feet

Physical Description: 2.5 Cubic Feet (30 hanging folders, 1 shared box of negatives, 1 shared binder of slides, and 1 flat file)

Scope and Contents Note: The performance photographs (approximately 1930-1989) include photographic prints, negatives, and photographic slides of Donn Arden and other dancers in dance productions choreographed by Donn Arden. The photographs primarily show the Donn Arden Dancers and the Arden-Fletcher Dancers at performances at the Lido in Paris, France, and in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged in rough chronological order by show or performance.

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Kessler Sisters, approximately 1960-1969 (0275) ([view online](#))

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Performers in a Donn Arden production at the Lido, Paris, France, approximately 1950-1969 (0277) ([view online](#))

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Performers in a Donn Arden production at the Lido, Paris, France, approximately 1950-1969 (0277a) ([view online](#))

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Performers onstage at the Lido Nightclub in Paris, France, approximately 1950-1969 (0372)

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Donn Arden with an unidentified woman, Paris, France, approximately 1950-1959 (0445) ([view online](#))

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## Rehearsal and backstage photographs, approximately approximately 1930-1989

Physical Description: 3.2 Linear Feet

Physical Description: 2.5 Cubic Feet (30 hanging folders, 1 shared box of negatives, 1 shared binder of slides, and 1 flat file)

Scope and Contents Note: The rehearsal and backstage photographs (approximately 1930-1989) include photographic prints, negatives, and photographic slides that depict Donn Arden and dancers in his shows training, getting dressed, rehearsing, and interacting backstage. The photographs primarily depict the Donn Arden Dancers and the Arden-Fletcher Dancers rehearsing for performances in Las Vegas, Nevada and at the Lido in Paris, France.

Arrangement: Materials remain in original order.

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## Personal and family photographs, approximately approximately 1920-1989

Physical Description: 3.2 Linear Feet

Physical Description: 2.5 Cubic Feet (30 hanging folders, 1 shared box of negatives, 1 shared binder of slides, and 1 flat file)

Scope and Contents Note: The personal and family photographs (approximately 1920-1989) contain photographic prints, negatives, and photographic slides that depict Donn Arden, his family, and his friends. The photographs include Arden's family gatherings; his colleagues Ron Fletcher, Pierre Lewis-Guerin, and Margaret Kelly (who was also known as Madame Bluebell); parties; award ceremonies; and portraits of Donn Arden.

Arrangement: Materials are organized by topic.

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Donn Arden Photographs

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