

Harvey Rettberg Papers

The Harvey Rettberg Papers are an additional source of research and information on Joe Sanders, Carleton Coon, and their Nighthawks musical group as well as the later jazz music scene.

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Harvey Rettberg
Title: Harvey Rettberg papers
Dates: circa 1950s-1990s, bulk 1960s-1970s
Size: 5 boxes, 1 3/4 cubic feet
Location: SC1-2

Administrative Information

Restrictions on access: Unrestricted access.

Additional physical form available: Photographs found in the collection have been digitized.

Publication note: Collection used for *The Coon-Sanders Nighthawks: The Band That Made Radio Famous*, by Fred Edmiston, McFarland Press, 2003.

Related collections in other repositories: The Marr Sound Archives located at the University of Missouri at Kansas City contains musical recordings and additional information on the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks.

Acquisition information: Donation, April, 2003; accession #2003-17.

Custodial history: Mr. Rettberg gave this collection to Fred Edmiston while he was researching his book. Mr. Edmiston sent the collection to the Kansas City Public Library with Mr. Rettberg's knowledge and agreement.

Citation note: Harvey Rettberg papers (SC1-2), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Collection Description

Biographical/Historical note

Harvey Rettberg and Clyde Hahn founded the Coon-Sanders Nighthawk Fan Club in 1959 at Sunset, South Carolina. Mr. Rettberg had listened to the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks on the radio during the 1920s and began at that time a lifetime appreciation of the group and the kind of music they played. He spent much time after the founding of the fan club researching the original members, corresponding with them and traveling to visit them. His resulting correspondence and snapshots, as reflected in this collection, give information on the band members some forty or more years after the group initially formed.

As of the time of the donation and processing of this collection, a form of the fan club was still in existence and known as the Coon Sanders Nighthawks Fans' Bash, meeting annually in May in Huntington, West Virginia, and featuring a variety of jazz musicians and groups.

Not only are the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks featured in the collection, but the collection also reflects Mr. Rettberg's interest in the field of jazz music and jazz musicians and reflects his interest in this type of music in general. It is apparent

that his interest developed into a hobby for him as well as a passion for knowing various musicians and for their music. Apparently his wife Hilda enjoyed his interest as well.

According to a newspaper clipping from 1968 included in the collection, Harvey Rettberg was a forester for the Duke Power Company and lived in South Carolina during the time frame of the collection. When this collection was given to Fred Edmiston, Mr. Rettberg was living in Pickens, South Carolina, was in his early 90's and gave Mr. Edmiston permission to relay his collection to the Kansas City Public Library. According to Mr. Edmiston, Rettberg died in 2004. The Social Security Death Index available online shows him born on July 1, 1911 and his date of death as December 1, 2004.

Scope and content note

Mr. Edmiston related at the time of donation that he had tried to put the materials in some type of order while using them. This general order was basically left by the processor. The collection has been arranged in alphabetical order by general subject categories. These categories include: various musicians who had a number of items associated with them in the collection; the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks; and Mr. Rettberg. Other categories include type of material as groupings of newspaper clippings, manuscripts, obituaries, photographs, publications, etc. Much of the content involves correspondence in the form of letters, postcards, and Christmas cards.

Of special interest concerning the fan club are club buttons as well as an original membership card. There were 48 photographs originally found in the collection and include black and white as well as color images. The negatives include 287 images and include 16mm, 35mm, and 3" x 5" negative sizes. Sixteen prints were made after processing the collection from these negatives. Some photographs are reproductions from an earlier time with the majority covering the time period of the collection. Included are seven photographs taken of the Coon-Sanders exhibit at the Kansas City Public Library put up after the Joe Sanders Collection was acquired in the 1960s. Most photographs and negatives have identification provided either by Rettberg or Edmiston.

The library in the early 1990s had received five cassette tapes of Coon-Sanders music. The source of acquisition of these tapes was not known at the time of processing of this collection. These tapes contained in one small box have been added to this material, assuming that perhaps someone from the fan club had given them.

Additional Resources

The Missouri Valley Special Collections department of the Kansas City Public Library contains various resources concerning Joe Sanders, Carleton Coon and the Nighthawks. The Joe Sanders Collection, SC1, contains scrapbooks with photographs and commentary that Mr. Sanders kept during the early traveling years of the Nighthawks. It also contains manuscript and sheet music, additional scrapbooks, memorabilia, photographs of Sanders as well as other musicians of the day, etc.

Fred Edmiston donated his working papers used for his book on the Nighthawks and those are in SC1-3. Included in this material are numerous photocopies of newspaper articles of the day that feature the group as well as tape recordings Edmiston made, correspondence, photographs, etc. His book is also available in the department and is a good source of information concerning the years of the Nighthawks before Carleton Coon's death.

The library acquired fan club co-founder Clyde Hahn's collection of Coon-Sanders material in 2006, SC1-4. The department's newspaper clipping collection also has clippings on the subject and the online Local History Database is also a good source of information.

Collection Inventory

Box 1

- Folder 1 - **Baxter, Phil**, Dallas, Texas - Correspondence, 1963-1966
- Folder 2 - **Baxter, Phil**, Dallas, Texas - Correspondence, 1967-1969, n.d.
- Folder 3 - **Baxter, Phil**, Dallas, Texas - Photographs(2) of Baxter; *El Torreón News*, December 1, 1928; newspaper clippings, 1961-1973 including an obituary for Baxter; 4 pieces of sheet music written by Baxter including "A Faded Summer Love" (2c), "I'm Gettin' Sick and Tired", and "Between Showers"
- Folder 4 - **Baxter, Phil**, Dallas, Texas - Miscellaneous items, mainly Christmas cards
- Folder 5 - **Brunn, Harry O.**, Buffalo and Synder, New York - Correspondence, 1961-1965
- Folder 6 - **Carew, Roy**, Washington, D.C. - Correspondence, 1962-1963, Christmas cards including one using a Coon-Sanders Nighthawks Orchestra photograph, ca1927, sent by Clyde Hahn in 1966
- Folder 7 - **Christmas Cards** - From various people, includes a card that used a photo of the Nighthawks Orchestra(1927) and sent by Clyde Hahn in 1966
- Folder 8 - **Coon-Sanders Nighthawks** - *Jazz Notes*, v.6, #2,3, 1961 which includes the Coon-Sanders story with Joe Sanders autobiography; typed manuscript entitled "Coon-Sanders Kansas City Nighthawks" by Dan Schroeder, n.d., 22p.
- Folder 9 - **Coon-Sanders Nighthawks** - Fan club buttons and pin; newspaper clippings; "Jazz Man Directory of Listeners", n.d.; correspondence, 1963-1972, n.d.
- Folder 10 - **Coon-Sanders Nighthawks** - 1st fan club card, club ads, etc.
- Folder 11 - **Cullum, Jim**, "Happy Jazz Band", San Antonio, Texas - Correspondence (including postcards), 1964-1966, n.d.; Manuscript entitled "Jazzin' By Jet - Happy Landing" - Hilda and Harvey, typewritten, 5p.
- Folder 12 - **Cullum, Jim**, San Antonio, Texas - Miscellaneous items including newspaper clippings, postcards, brochures, flyers, etc.
- Folder 13 - **Ewell, Don**, Chicago, Illinois - Correspondence, 1960-1964, n.d.; Christmas cards
- Folder 14 - **Griffiths, David**, Glamorgan, Wales - Correspondence, 1973-1976; miscellaneous items
- Folder 15 - 19 - **Hitch, Curt**, "The Happy Harmonists" - Correspondence, 1960-1984; photographs of Curt Hitch and the Happy Harmonist group

Box 2

- Folder 1 - **Manuscripts**, re: Coon-Sanders - From Karl Kramer's unpublished history of the Music Corporation of America - "That Toddling Town", Chapter 4 and "Do You Remember the Nighthawks?", Chapter 8, typewritten; By Harvey Rettberg and same papers also identified as by Dan Schroeder - "Coon-Sanders Kansas City Nighthawks", 8 p., typewritten and "Background and History of the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks", 16 p., typewritten
- Folder 2 - **Miscellaneous** - Advertising pieces of various groups, program for The Concordia Orchestra, 1994

- Folder 3 - **Miscellaneous** - 2 photocopies of Sanders correspondence, 1933, 1948; article entitled "Die erste Radio-Hot-Band der Welt: The Kansas City Nighthawks", "Radio's Aces, The Coon-Sanders Nighthawks", **High Fidelity Magazine**, March 1965, p.117; and published items concerning Louis Armstrong.
- Folder 4 & 5 - **New Orleans Jazz Museum and New Orleans Jazz Club** - Miscellaneous programs and ephemera, newspaper clippings, correspondence primarily addressed to Harvey Rettberg, ca1960s
- Folder 6 - **Newspaper Clippings** - Found loose, photocopied, 1950s-90s, includes various groups as well as Coon-Sanders, includes obituary of Joe Sanders from the *Kansas City Times*, May 16, 1965 and "America's Band" by Joe Popper published in the *Kansas City Star Magazine*, July 9, 1989.
- Folder 7 - **Obituaries and 2 Photographs** - 2 color snapshots identified as Otis Zirkle at grave of Bix Beiderbecke; newspaper clipping obituaries for the following musicians: Red Allen, Lil Armstrong, Paul Barbarin, Harry Barris, Irving Berlin, Herman Chittison, George Foster, Walter Given, Arthur Godfrey, Edmond Hall, M. Hamby, Julius Hofmann, Joe Howard, Irving Kauffman, Bennie Krueger, George Laine, Nick La Rocca, Carmen Lombardo, Clarence Lusk, Jimmy McPartland, Lizzie Miles, Red Nichols, Tony Pastor, Harry Reser, Russel Robinson, Pee Wee Russell, Gertrude Sanders, Joe Sanders, Mugsy Spanier, Tony Spargo, Charlie Spivak, Jack Teagarden, Ted Weems, Paul Whiteman,
- Folder 8 - **Parenti, Tony**, Flushing, N.Y. - Miscellaneous items including cards, advertisements, etc.
- Folder 9 & 10 - **Photographs and Negatives** - numerous photographs including images of the Sanders exhibit at the Kansas City Public Library at 12th and Oak, Ted Weems Orchestra, and composite of various musicians as well as Coon-Sanders group, snapshots of fan club members and of Harvey Rettberg and various musicians.
- Folder 11 - **Publications** - C.R.C. Newsletter (Collectors Record Club), 1975-1988, inc.
- Folder 12 - **Publications** - *Dave's Jazz Magazine*, August/September, 1961; *Downbeat*, February 27, 1964
- Folder 13 - **Publications** - *International Musician*, April, 1967 and November 1968
- Folder 14 - **Publications** - *Jazz Beat*, Winter 1989/90; August 16, 1990, Fall/Winter, 1990/91
- Folder 15 - **Publications** - *Jazz Notes*, February/March, 1961 (2c) and V.6, #1 - Features article on Coon-Sanders band in 2 parts.
- Folder 16 - **Publications** - *Jazzology* Newsletter, 1968-1979, incomplete.
- Folder 17 - **Publications** - *Joslin's Jazz Journal*, February, 1983 and May, 1983 (features Coon-Sanders band). Articles are photocopied.
- Folder 18 - **Publications** - *Mississippi Rag*, January, 1974 (features article on Coon-Sanders and the fan club); July, 1974; August, 1989; and April, 1991 (Features article on Coon-Sanders). Articles photocopied.
- Folder 19 - **Publications** - *Palaver Jazz Music* (PJM), July, 1961; *Rag Times*, January, 1971, *Ragtime Society*, December, 1964.
- Folder 20 - **Publications** - *Saturday Review*, May 14, 1966 (Contains article "The Dancing World of Coon-Sanders" by Herb Shultz as well as a letter from Shultz to Harvey Rettberg); *The Second Line*, March/April, 1956; and *The Tulanian*, March, 1960.

Box 3

- Folder 1 - **Rettberg, Harvey** -Articles (photocopies) by Rettberg - "Coon-Sanders (A Study in Nostalgia)", *The Second Line*, Jan.-Feb., 1962 and March-April, 1962; and "Those Nostalgic Nighthawks", source unknown.
- Folder 2 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, A-B, 1960-1989, organized alphabetically by sender - 11 pieces - Senders include: Ed Abbs, Sylvester (Hooley) Ahola, Tony Almerico, Clyde Austin, Polo Barnes, Leah Bezin, J. D. Bivens, Werner Boswell, Agnes Brown, and Herschel Burford.
- Folder 3 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, C-D, 1960-1988, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 17 pieces - Senders include: Milton Caniff, Jack Cathcart, Annie Coburn, Ken Cooper, Johnny Coon, K.W. Cooper, Dan Crutcher, Tom DeBray, William Jennings Bryan Dorn, and Rex Downing.
- Folder 4 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, E-H, 1959-1965, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 16 letters plus photocopied newspaper clippings. Senders include: John Elsmann, Bill Fend, Arthur Godfrey, Walter Ewald, Parker Gibbs, Clyde Hahn, Cliff Halliburton, C..E. Henderson, and Mary Higbee.
- Folder 5 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, K-L, 1960-1965, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 14 letters. Senders include: George Kay, Frank Kelly, Bonnie Kirby, Karl Kramer, John and Al Lansing, Nick LaRocca, and Eddie Leonard, Jr.
- Folder 6 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, M, 1960-1993, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 13 letters. Senders include: W. P. McClung, Larry McDonald, Pauline McMeachin, Gerry McVey, Ed Marsh, Dexter Miller, and Willis Morrisette.
- Folder 7 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, N-R, 1957-1990, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 9 letters. Senders include: Spiegle Newell, Murray C. O'Connor, Henry Pace, Jr. (Includes obituary for Clyde Hahn), Conrad Renfroe, Earle Roberts, Paul Rossetter(?), Brian Rust, and Norma Ryker.
- Folder 8 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, S, 1958-1979, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 19 letters. Senders include: Priscilla Sanders, Trudy Sanders, Duncan Schiedt, Dan Schroeder, Nancy Coon Searles, "Slick", Joan Spalding, Jules Stein, Eula Coon Stookey, and Florence Stout.
- Folder 9 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Correspondence, T-Z, 1960-1986, organized alphabetically by sender, includes notations by Fred Edmiston on some letters - 13 letters. Senders include: Jay Tartell, Harold Thiell, Adele (no last name), Ted Weems, Adam Welborn, Otis Zirkle, and a few letters with first names only.
- Folder 10 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Miscellaneous - Manuscript by Rettberg entitled "A Study in Nostalgia" and numerous newspaper clippings on various musicians and other subjects.
- Folder 11 - **Rettberg, Harvey** - Miscellaneous - Ephemera, programs, postcards, etc.
- Folder 12 - **Senter, Boyd**, Mio, Michigan - Correspondence to Rettbergs, 1962-1966.
- Folder 13 - **Senter, Boyd**, Mio, Michigan - Miscellaneous items including Christmas card, negative, "An Interview With Boyd Senter" by Ralph W. Miller and John Crosley.
- Folder 14 - **Sheet Music** - *Jazzman's Blues* by Harry E. Godwin, Brainerd Kremer and Ray Sterling.
- Folder 15 & 16 - **Souchen, Harry and Edmond**, New Orleans, Louisiana - Correspondence, 1958-1968, addressed primarily to the Rettbergs - 43 items.

- Folder 17 - **Souchon, Harry and Edmond**, New Orleans, Louisiana - Miscellaneous items
- Folder 18 - **Walton, Clarence "Walt"**, Norfolk, Virginia - Correspondence, 1965-1977, addressed to the Rettbergs - 13 items and advertising piece with information on Clarence Walton.
- Folder 19 - **Wright, Harry A.**, Ferndale, Michigan, Correspondence, 1969-1971, addressed to the Rettbergs - 5 letters and 1 Christmas card; 3 photographs.

Box 4 - Negatives - 287 images; Prints - 16 images

- Sleeve 1 - 3 unidentified negatives - All negatives in packet together, "Coon-Sanders" written on packet.
- Sleeve 2 - 2 negatives - Fred Edmiston wrote on negative sleeve "Russ & Sis Stout, Russ was banjoist for Coon-Sanders".
- Sleeve 3 - 3 negative strips, 12 images, outside of packet said "Salty Dogs".
- Sleeve 4 - 3 negatives, identified as part of Joe Sanders Orchestra, Joe Sanders orchestra in plane, Rex, Count, and Mr. Downing and Joe Sanders. Third negative made into 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 5 - 6 negatives, identified as R. Stout and H. Thiell, 1961, Ed Rettberg in center. Additional note by Fred Edmiston, "Russ Stout (banjo) and Harold Thiell (reeds) played with Coon-Sanders. Ed Rettberg is Harvey's son". Third negative made into 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 6 - 2 negatives, identified as Joe Richolson (tpt. C-S) Bakersfield, July 1961. Fred Edmiston wrote "Richolson played trumpet with Coon-Sanders". Second negative made into 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 7 - 1 negative, identified as Floyd Estep (Reeds, C-S), Burbank, Cal., 1961. Fred Edmiston note "Floyd Estep, son of Frank M. "Pop" Estep, played reeds with Coon-Sanders". 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 8 - 1 negative, 35mm, no identification, group scene.
- Sleeve 9 - 3 negatives, Joe Sanders, at home, 7626 Pennsylvania, Fred Edmiston added to envelope, "16 July 1961". Also contains the photographs, 4" x 5", developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 10 - 3 negatives, 35mm, identified by processor as Carleton Coon and Joe Sanders, Coon-Sanders Novelty Orchestra, Coon-Sanders Nighthawks.
- Sleeve 11 - 11 negatives - no identification.
- Sleeve 12 - 2 negative strips, 8 images, unidentified.
- Sleeve 13 - 2 negatives, envelope says "Nick LaRocca-New Orleans, 1960".
- Sleeve 14 - 4 negatives, envelope says "Nighthawks, West Coast trip". Fred Edmiston wrote on envelope "When H. Rettberg drove across the U.S., summer 1961 and visited old Nighthawks." Second negative made into 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 15 - 1 negative - Ted Weems orchestra.
- Sleeve 16 - 3 negatives, unidentified.
- Sleeve 17 - 3-35mm strips, 12 images, envelope says "New Orleans, 1966".
- Sleeve 18 - 2 negatives, envelope says "Eula Coon Stookey (Coonie's widow), Hilda Rettberg, Franklin Stookey, Columbia, Mo., July 1961". Also contains the photographs, 4" x 5", developed by the library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 19 - 3 negatives, envelope says "Rex Downing (tbn. Coon-Sanders), Little Rock, 6/61; Rex and Hilda R.; Rex and Kay Downing". First and second

negative made into 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.

- Sleeve 20 - 1 negative, envelope says "Russ Stout, Clyde, Sis Stout, Hilda Rettberg at Whitewater Falls, 1961". 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 21 - 1 negative, envelope says "Harold Thiell (Reeds, Coon-Sanders), St. Augustine, 9/61". 4" x 5" print, developed by library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 22 - 1 negative, envelope says "Floyd Estep, Reeds, Burbank, Calif., 1961".
- Sleeve 23 - 2 negatives, envelope says "Phil Baxter negatives". Also contains the photographs, 4" x 5", developed by the library after collection processed.
- Sleeve 24 - 2 negatives, envelope says "Tal Henry, Pleasant Garden, N.C., 1960, Tal Henry Orch. from Movietone short".
- Sleeve 25 - 4-35mm strips, 10 images, back of envelope says "Boyd Senter".
- Sleeve 26 - 1-35mm partial strip, 1 image, envelope says "Coon-Sanders".
- Sleeve 27 - 1 negative, street scene, unidentified.
- Sleeve 28 - 5-16mm strips, 24 images, not identified (possibly Coon-Sanders reunion).
- Sleeve 29 - 1 - 35mm strip, 4 images, not identified.
- Sleeve 30 - 6 - 35mm strips, 22 images, not identified.
- Sleeve 31 - 3 - 35mm strips, 6 images, envelope says "1965-Texas".
- Sleeve 32 - 1 negative, interior home scene, unidentified.
- Sleeve 33 - 1-35mm negative, identified as Phil Baxter.
- Sleeve 34 - 3 -35mm strips and partial strips, 6 images, unidentified.
- Sleeve 35 - 4 -35mm strips, 9 images, unidentified.
- Sleeve 36 - 2 -35mm partial strips, 5 images, unidentified.
- Sleeve 37 - 2 negatives, envelope says "Agnes & Ray Burke".
- Sleeve 38 - 5 negatives, envelope says "Duke Weiborn", a mix of people, unidentified.
- Sleeve 39 - 3 - 35mm strips, 11 images, unidentified, may be Coon-Sanders reunion.
- Sleeve 40 & 41 - 7 negatives, unidentified, envelope says "Last Straws", outdoor scenes.
- Sleeve 42 - 12 -35mm strips, 24 images, unidentified, interiors with people.
- Sleeve 43 - 4 negatives - envelope says "Ed Almagordo".
- Sleeve 44 - 11 -16mm strips, 42 images, envelope says "Xmas-1985, W.Va. & Pa., 1986".
- Sleeve 45 - 4 -35mm strips, 9 images, envelope says "Xmas-1985, W.Va. & Pa., 1986".
- Sleeve 46 - 1 negative, unidentified.

Box 5 - 5 cassette tapes of Coon-Sanders Nighthawks music (Not part of original Harvey Rettberg Papers donation)

Processed by Special Collections Librarian Sara Nyman, 2003-2005.