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Guide to the Maria H. Dehon Polk Collection of Constant Coquelin

GEN MSS 453



by Karen M. Spicher

January 2000

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	4
Immediate Source of Acquisition	4
Conditions Governing Access	4
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
CONSTANT COQUELIN (1841-1909) AND MARIA H. DEHON POLK (ca. 1857-1941)	4
Scope and Contents	4
Collection Contents	6
Series I: Letters to Maria H. Dehon Polk, 1894-1934	6
LETTERS FROM CONSTANT COQUELIN	6
TRANSCRIPTIONS OF LETTERS FROM CONSTANT COQUELIN	6
LETTERS FROM OTHER CORRESPONDENTS	6
Series II: Writings by Constant Coquelin, [ca. 1884]	8
Series III: Printed Material, 1901-1929	9
Series IV: Photographs, 1894-1906	10
PORTRAITS OF CONSTANT COQUELIN	10
OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS	10
Oversize	11
Restricted Fragile	12
Selected Search Terms	13

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 453

CREATOR: Polk, Maria H. Dehon, approximately 1857-1941, collector

TITLE: Maria H. Dehon Polk collection of Constant Coquelin

DATES: [ca. 1884]-1934

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.25 linear feet (3 boxes) + 2 portfolios

LANGUAGE: French

SUMMARY: Chiefly letters from Coquelin to Maria H. Dehon, including ALS and manuscript transcriptions, and photographs. Also present are a small amount of other correspondence, writings by Coquelin, including an undated holograph of a work on Molière's *Tartuffe*, published in 1884, printed materials concerning the *Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens*, other ephemera, and clippings. Letters from Coquelin, 1894-1908 and undated, concern his friendship with Dehon, their travels, and Coquelin's performances and tours. The letters discuss the *Comédie-Française*, the *Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin*, the *Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens*, and friends and colleagues including Ernest Coquelin, Jean Coquelin, Sarah Bernhardt, Geraldine Farrar, Edmond Rostand, Pierre-Marie-René Waldeck Rousseau, and artist Jean-Charles Cazin. Other correspondence includes letters to Dehon from A. Chabert concerning the establishment of a *Musée Cazin-Coquelin*. Photographs include cabinet photographs and prints, most portraits of Coquelin, including several portraits in costume as *Cyrano de Bergerac* and other theater roles. Also present are postcards showing views of Pont-aux-Dames and a set of photographs of paintings of Coquelin in various theater roles.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.polkcoq>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.polkcoq>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box

f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of the estate of Maria H. Dehon Polk, 1941.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Restricted Fragile in portfolio 2 may only be consulted with permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies for reference use have been substituted in the main files.

Conditions Governing Use

The Maria H. Dehon Polk Collection of Constant Coquelin is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Maria H. Dehon Polk Collection of Constant Coquelin. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

CONSTANT COQUELIN (1841-1909) AND MARIA H. DEHON POLK (ca. 1857-1941)

The French actor Constant Coquelin, called Coquelin aîné, was noted for his roles in the plays of Molière and other classical dramatists. He was a member of the Comédie-Française, 1860-1886 and 1890-1892, and toured extensively in Europe and the Americas. In 1897 he created the title role in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, where he served as director. In 1900 he toured the United States with Sarah Bernhardt. Coquelin was the author of works on dramatists and on the art of acting, including *L'art et le comédien* (1880), *Molière et le Misanthrope* (1881), and *Tartuffe* (1884). In 1905 he founded the Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens, a community for retired actors, at Pont-aux-Dames. Coquelin died at Pont-aux-Dames in 1909, while rehearsing Rostand's *Chantecler*. Both Coquelin's younger brother, Ernest, called Coquelin cadet, and Coquelin's son, Jean, were actors.

Maria H. Dehon was born and lived in New York City, where she was known for her friendships with singers of the Metropolitan Opera. She was associated with Constant Coquelin during her travels in Europe in the 1890s and during his subsequent tours of the United States. They maintained a friendship and correspondence until his death. Dehon married William Mecklenburg Polk, a physician, in 1914. William Mecklenburg Polk died in 1918.

Scope and Contents

The Maria H. Dehon Polk Collection of Constant Coquelin consists of correspondence, photographs, and a small amount of writings, ephemera, clippings, and other printed material. The collection documents Maria H. Dehon's friendship with Coquelin and reflects her interest in his career.

The collection is housed in three boxes and two portfolios and is organized into four series: *Letters to Maria H. Dehon Polk*, *Writings by Constant Coquelin*, *Printed Material*, and *Photographs*. The portfolios contain Oversize and Restricted Fragile materials.

[Series I, *Letters to Maria H. Dehon Polk*](#), consists of three subseries, each arranged chronologically: Letters From Constant Coquelin, Transcriptions of Letters From Constant Coquelin, and Letters From Other Correspondents. Letters and transcriptions of letters from Coquelin, in French, 1894-1908 and undated, concern his friendship with Dehon, their travels, and Coquelin's performances and tours. Letters discuss his legal difficulties with the Comédie-Française, his work with the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin and other theaters, the founding of the Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens, and friends and colleagues including Ernest Coquelin, Jean Coquelin, Sarah Bernhardt, Geraldine Farrar, Edmond Rostand, Pierre-Marie-René Waldeck-Rousseau, and artist Jean-Charles Cazin. Some letters are written on printed or photographic postcards showing portraits of Coquelin or views of the Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens. Transcriptions are written in an unidentified hand and include most of the original letters present in the collection, as well as many additional letters not otherwise present. A few transcriptions were annotated in holograph by Dehon during the 1920s-30s regarding their content. Also present are a few envelopes annotated by Dehon, 1913-1920 and undated, concerning her intentions for disposition of the letters. The third subseries consists of a few letters from A. Chabert, in French, 1910-1934, and Mrs. John Innes Kane, undated. Letters from Chabert concern his interest in memorializing Coquelin and the establishment of a Musée Cazin-Coquelin in Pas-de-Calais.

[Series II, *Writings by Constant Coquelin*](#), consists of an undated holograph of Coquelin's *Tartuffe* (published by Paul Ollendorff, Paris, 1884), and a holograph notebook titled "Joseph D'Arimathie, 3eme acte," undated.

[Series III, *Printed Material*](#), is arranged alphabetically. Material relating to the Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens includes a program for a benefit performance, 1908, and a few promotional items, 1929 and undated. Also present are a program for a benefit for the Society of the Relief of the Destitute Blind, New York, 1901, and newspaper clippings, most concerning Coquelin's death, [1905]-1909 and undated.

[Series IV, *Photographs*](#), is organized into two subseries: Portraits of Constant Coquelin and Other Photographs. Portraits are cabinet photographs and prints, most undated, several with signatures or inscriptions to Dehon. Included are portraits taken in costume as Cyrano de Bergerac and other theater roles. Other photographs are undated and include a group taken late in Coquelin's life on board a ship with several unidentified people. Also present are postcards showing views of Pont-aux-Dames and a set of photographs of paintings of Coquelin, with a few paintings of Coquelin cadet and Jean Coquelin, in costume in various theater roles. The set is inscribed to Dehon and each photograph is captioned in holograph by Coquelin.

Collection Contents

Series I: Letters to Maria H. Dehon Polk, 1894-1934

0.42 linear feet (1 box)

Series I, *Letters to Maria H. Dehon Polk*, is organized into three subseries: Letters from Constant Coquelin, Transcriptions of Letters from Constant Coquelin, and Letters from Other Correspondents.

LETTERS FROM CONSTANT COQUELIN

b. 1, f. 1	Letters	1894-99
b. 1, f. 2	Letters	1900-04
b. 1, f. 3	Letters	1905-08
b. 1, f. 4	Letters Includes photographic postcard showing the theater at Pont-aux-Dames	n.d.
b. 1, f. 5	Envelopes annotated by Maria H. Dehon Polk, holograph	1913-20, n.d.

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF LETTERS FROM CONSTANT COQUELIN

b. 1, f. 6	Letters dated 1894	n.d.
b. 1, f. 7	Letters dated 1895	n.d.
b. 1, f. 8	Letters dated 1896	n.d.
b. 1, f. 9	Letters dated 1897	n.d.
b. 1, f. 10	Letters dated 1898	n.d.
b. 1, f. 11	Letters dated 1899	n.d.
b. 1, f. 12	Letters dated 1900	n.d.
b. 1, f. 13	Letters dated 1901	n.d.
b. 1, f. 14	Letters dated 1902	n.d.
b. 1, f. 15	Letters dated 1903	n.d.
b. 1, f. 16	Letters dated 1904	n.d.
b. 1, f. 17	Letters dated 1905 Feb-May	n.d.
b. 1, f. 18	Letters dated 1905 Jun-Dec	n.d.
b. 1, f. 19	Letters dated 1906	n.d.
b. 1, f. 20	Letters dated 1907	n.d.
b. 1, f. 21	Letters dated 1908	n.d.

LETTERS FROM OTHER CORRESPONDENTS

b. 1, f. 22	Chabert, A.	1910-34
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LETTERS FROM OTHER CORRESPONDENTS (continued)

b. 1, f. 23

Kane, Mrs. John Innes

n.d.

Series II: Writings by Constant Coquelin, [ca. 1884]*0.1 linear feet (.25 box)*

b. 2, f. 24	"Joseph D'Armathie, 3eme acte," holograph notebook Accompanied by an envelope with brief notes written by Marie H. Dehon Polk, holograph	n.d.
b. 2, f. 25	"Tartuffe," holograph, bound volume	[ca. 1884]

Series III: Printed Material, 1901-1929*0.1 linear feet (.25 box)*

b. 2, f. 26	Brémont, Léon. <i>L'histoire de Pont-aux-Dames</i> (Paris: Vallaz)	1929
b. 2, f. 27	Engraved portrait of Moses Mendelssohn	n.d.
b. 2, f. 28	"Entertainment for the Benefit of the Home for the Destitute Blind, Waldorf-Astoria," program	1901 Apr 12
b. 2, f. 29	Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens. "Programme de la Matinée de gala"	1908 Sep 20
b. 2, f. 30	Newspaper clippings	[1905]-09, n.d.
b. 2, f. 31	"Pour aller à Pont-aux-Dames," promotional map	n.d.

Series IV: Photographs, 1894-1906*0.63 linear feet (1.5 box)*

Series IV, *Photographs*, is organized into two subseries: Portraits of Constant Coquelin and Other Photographs. Portraits are arranged alphabetically by photographer.

PORTRAITS OF CONSTANT COQUELIN

b. 2, f. 32	Boyer, Paul, and Albert Hauteceur, Paris. Cabinet photograph, as Cyrano de Bergerac	n.d.
b. 2, f. 33	Chapiro, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Cabinet photograph	n.d.
b. 2, f. 34	Dupont, Aimé, New York. Print, inscribed to Dehon	n.d.
b. 2, f. 35	Falk, B. J., New York. Cabinet photograph, as Le Rebbe in <i>L'ami Fritz</i> , signed	1894
b. 2, f. 36	Hollyer, Frederick, London. Print	n.d.
b. 2, f. 37	Nadar, Paris. Print, as Cyrano de Bergerac, signed	n.d.
b. 2, f. 38	Nadar, Paris. Print, as Cyrano de Bergerac, signed	n.d.
b. 2, f. 39	Unidentified, Argentina. Print	n.d.
b. 2, f. 40	Unidentified. "M. Coquelin aîné dans Hamlet," printed postcard	n.d.
b. 2, f. 41	Unidentified. Photographic postcard, inscribed to Dehon	1906 Aug 19
b. 2, f. 42	Valleto y Cia., Mexico. Cabinet photograph, inscribed to Dehon	1894
b. 2, f. 43	Walery, Paris. Photographic postcard, in Asian costume	n.d.

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS

b. 2, f. 44	8 prints of CC with several unidentified people on board a ship Also stored in: Oversize, port, folder 53	n.d.
b. 2, f. 45	Maison de retraite des artistes dramatiques. 5 printed postcards Duplicates are stored in Restricted Fragile	n.d.
b. 2, f. 46	Maison de retraite des artistes dramatiques. Set of 17 printed postcards Accompanied by a printed envelope	n.d.
b. 2, f. 47	Printed postcard showing a scene in Venice	n.d.
b. 2, f. 48	2 photographic postcards showing scenes in Syria	n.d.
b. 3, f. 49-51	Set of mounted prints made by Van Bosch, Paris, of paintings of CC in various costumes, inscribed to Dehon	n.d.
b. 3, f. 52	Original portfolio for prints in folders 49-51	n.d.

Oversize

(1 portfolio)

b. Port, folder 53 1 of 8 prints of CC with several unidentified people on board a ship (in Series IV) n.d.

Restricted Fragile

(1 portfolio)

This portfolio contains fragile originals. The material may only be seen with the permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies have been substituted in the main files for reference use.

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. Port, f. 54 Box 2, folder 45

b. Port, f. 55 Box 2, folder 30

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Actors -- France
French drama
Theater -- France

Genres / Formats

Cabinet photographs
Photographic prints

Occupations

Actors -- France

Names

Bernhardt, Sarah, 1844-1923
Cazin, Jean-Charles, 1841-1901
Chabert, A.
Coquelin, Constant, 1841-1909
Coquelin, Ernest
Coquelin, Jean, 1865-1944
Farrar, Geraldine, 1882-1967
Molière, 1622-1673 -- Criticism and interpretation
Polk, Maria H. Dehon, approximately 1857-1941
Rostand, Edmond, 1868-1918
Waldeck-Rousseau, Pierre-Marie-René, 1846-1904

Corporate Bodies

Comédie-Française
Maison de retraite des vieux comédiens
Musée Cazin-Coquelin
Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin (Paris, France)

Contributors

Polk, Maria H. Dehon, approximately 1857-1941, collector
Coquelin, Constant, 1841-1909
Coquelin, Constant, 1841-1909 (Tartuffe)