



## Legacy Finding Aid for Manuscript and Photograph Collections

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Finding aids are narrative guides to archival collections created by the repository to describe the contents of the material. They often provide much more detailed information than can be found in individual catalog records. Contents of finding aids often include short biographies or histories, processing notes, information about the size, scope, and material types included in the collection, guidance on how to navigate the collection, and an index to box and folder contents.

### What are Legacy Finding Aids?

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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.**  
**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS FINDING AID**

**Title:** MS 449 Lafayette Square Opera House Records, 1894-1905

**Processor:** Peggy Armstrong

**Date:** May 30, 1997

In 1894, **John W. Albaugh** and **Uriah H. Painter** obtained a ninety-nine-year lease from Mrs. James G. Blaine to build the **Lafayette Square Opera House** at the site of the Seward/Blaine house on the east side of Lafayette Square. After an initial controversy about building on the site was resolved, noted architects Wood and Lovell of Chicago were hired for the design and construction of the building. The theater opened for performances in September 1895. The opera house could seat 1800 and was top quality for its time, being fireproof and having an elevator to provide access to its roof garden and basement-level Turkish baths.

In 1897, the partnership of Albaugh and Painter was dissolved over financial disagreements and Painter became the sole owner. The ill will between the two original owners made some booking companies wary of scheduling shows, and the effects of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the death of Uriah Painter in 1900 contributed to an uncertain operation. After Painter's death, the theater operated as Washington's first stock company theater. Efforts to find a suitable buyer began in 1901. After the 1901-1902 season, the facilities were leased and were operated for some time as the Lafayette Ladies' Club Theatre. Competition among Washington theaters increased at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Lafayette Square Opera House was the loser, forcing its sale in 1905 when it became the Belasco Theatre.

**Scope and Content:** The Lafayette Square Opera House Records, 1894-1905, is arranged in three series:

SERIES I: CORRESPONDENCE consists of business correspondence related to the construction and operation of the theater and to the controversy between owners John W. Albaugh and Uriah H. Painter. The series also includes newspaper clippings related to initial dispute over building site and court papers produced during litigation between Albaugh and Painter. Some of the correspondence mentions Mr. Painter's other business interests, such as an ice house and telegraph office in Pennsylvania. The series is arranged by document type and then chronologically.

SERIES II: CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS consists of materials documenting the

construction of the theater, including the original survey of the site, building permit, construction specifications, contracts, financial accounts, elevator proposals and blueprints, bids for fireproofing, and a complete series of construction photographs. The series is arranged by document type and then chronologically.

SERIES III: PRODUCTION DOCUMENTS consists of detailed reports of box office receipts, operating accounts, playbills and programs, contracts with performers; scrapbooks of newspaper reviews, and portraits of performers. The series is arranged by document type and then chronologically.

**Size:** 3.6 cubic feet (eight containers and one oversize folder)

**Donor:** Manwood Darlington, ca. 1950

**Restrictions:** None

**Preferred citation:** [identified item], *Lafayette Square Opera House Records*, [container #, folder #]. The Historical Society of Washington, DC

**Related materials:**

Groce, Eileen Taddonio. "Lafayette Square Opera House: End of Act I in Washington, D.C. Theatre History." (student paper, 1982)

Hearn, Colleen. "Receiving Roses, But Dancing on Steel: Romance and Problems of Dancing at the Lafayette Square Opera House, 1895-1905." (student paper, 1979)

MS 447 Washington, D.C. Theater Collection, 1816-1945 (includes playbills and other memorabilia from the Lafayette Square Opera House, 1895-1905)

## Container List

### SERIES I: CORRESPONDENCE

#### Container 1

**Folder 1:** Newspaper clippings, 1894-1895, related to controversy over using the Blaine property to build a theater; correspondence regarding rental expenses, July 1896; and booking agent circular advertising safety features of building, undated.

**Folder 2:** Correspondence, 1897, including letters concerning controversy between Painter and Albaugh.

**Folder 3:** Court papers, 1897, related to litigation between Painter and Albaugh.

**Folder 4:** Correspondence, 1898, including letters on the effects of the litigation and the Spanish-American war on the theater.

**Folder 5:** Correspondence, 1899, including references to the difficulty of obtaining quality attractions.

**Folder 6:** Correspondence, January-February 1900.

**Folder 7:** Correspondence, March-April 1900.

**Folder 8:** Correspondence, May-June 1900.

**Folder 9:** Correspondence, July-December 1900, including references to Painter's illness and death.

**Folder 10:** Correspondence, 1901, including references to problem with Inauguration events.

**Folder 11:** Correspondence, January-February 1902, including efforts to sell the theater.

**Folder 12:** Correspondence, 1904-1905.

**Folder 13:** Correspondence, 1905, including letters about sale of theater.

**SERIES II: CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS**

**Folder 14:** Building permit, December 28, 1894, and original survey, May 15, 1895.

**Folder 15:** Construction specifications.

**Folder 16:** Construction contracts, 1894-1895.

**Folder 17:** Construction contracts, 1895.

**Folder 18:** Construction costs, 1895.

**Folder 19:** Elevator proposals, 1896-1897.

**Folder 20:** Elevator proposals, 1896.

**Folder 21:** Elevator blueprints (originals in oversize folder).

**Folder 22:** Fireproofing bids, 1895.

**Folder 23:** Vouchers paid, 1895.

**Folder 24:** Vouchers paid, 1896.

**Folder 25:** Financial accounts, ca. 1895.

**Folder 26:** Certificates from Wood and Lovell on job completions, 1895.

**Folder 27:** Photographs of theater construction. (SEE containers 6 and 7)

**SERIES III: PRODUCTION DOCUMENTS**

**Folder 28:** Box office receipts, September 30, 1895-May 12, 1896, and September 11, 1899-May 12, 1900. (SEE also container 8).

**Container 2**

**Folder 29:** Box office receipts, September 12, 1896-April 17, 1897.

**Folder 30:** Box office receipts, September 12, 1896-June 26, 1897.

**Folder 31:** Box office receipts, May 16, 1897-June 26, 1897 and September 13, 1897-May 12, 1898.

**Folder 32:** Box office receipts, May September 14, 1897-April 20, 1899.

**Folder 33:** Box office receipts, October 14, 1901-May 19, 1902.

**Folder 34:** Financial accounts, 1899.

**Folder 35:** Financial accounts, 1900; tax assessments, 1901.

**Folder 36:** Financial accounts, Lafayette Baths, consisting of record of ticket sales, January 17-April 20, 1900, and record of purchases, November 18, 1901-March 20, 1902.

**Folder 37:** Financial accounts, Lafayette Baths, consisting of record of expenditures, April 21, 1901-March 15, 1902. (Also includes purchases of beverages at the end of ledger.)

### **Container 3**

**Folder 38:** Playbills and programs (including some for other theaters), 1890-1895.

**Folder 39:** Playbills and programs (including some for other theaters), 1896-1902.

**Folder 40:** Production contracts, 1898-1899.

**Folder 41:** Tickets for performances, 1900, 1902; tickets for the "Lafayette Baths," undated; and stock company programs, ca. 1901.

**Folder 42:** Letterhead and advertisements, including brochure for the Turkish and Russian Baths, undated.

**Folder 43:** News clippings, 1895.

### **Container 4**

**Folder 44:** Scrapbook, 1895-1896.

**Folder 45:** Scrapbook, 1898-1899.

**Folder 46:** Scrapbook, 1899-1900.

### **Container 5**

**Folder 47:** Scrapbook, 1900-1901.

**Container 6:** Construction photographs, numbers 1-217.

**Container 7:** Construction photographs, numbers 218-405.

**Container 8:** Box office receipts, September 30, 1895-May 12, 1896, and September 11, 1899-May 12, 1900. Bound volume.

**Folder 48 (oversize):** Oversize items described above.