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John Libera Collection

1934-1988

1 box (0.25 linear feet)

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A member of the Polish community in Southbridge, Mass., John Libera (1919-2007) was a long-time employee of American Optical Company, but was best known as a promoter of polka music and dancing. A performer, song writer, and host of a radio show for over thirty years, Libera was inducted into the Polka Music Hall of Fame in 1982 and invited to perform at the American Folklife Festival in 1988.

The Libera collection consists of four photographs of the Polish community in Southbridge during the 1930s along with fourteen photos, a videotape, and some correspondence and ephemera relating to the American Folklife Festival.

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Background on John Libera

A well-known figure in Southbridge's Polish community and polka promoter, John Libera was born in Southbridge, Mass., on April 20, 1919, the son of Joseph and Mary (Slupek) Libera. After serving in the Navy during the Second World War II, Libera enjoyed a long career as a researcher at American Optical Co., becoming a member and president of both its Quarter Century Club and Wellsworth Athletic Association.

A passion for polka music led Libera into a career as a radio personality. For over 33 years beginning in the mid-1950s, he hosted a Polish radio show on WESO radio in Southbridge, earning the nickname "Mr. Polka Man." An instant hit, his show expanded to WNEB in Worcester and eventually onto FM broadcasting, and it spawned other programs, including the "Polka Jamboree" and "Sunset Polkatime Show." Libera was not simply a disk jockey, however, he was a talented musician, songwriter, recording artist, and for many years a dance instructor. In recognition of his efforts, Libera was made a member of the International Polka Association and was inducted into the Polka Music Hall of Fame in 1982. In 1988, he was selected to take part in the American Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, where he and the Massachusetts band, Bay State IV, demonstrated their beloved music. Libera died in Worcester on Aug. 27, 2007, at the age of 88.



Polish Tigers baseball team, ca.1935

Scope of collection

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Inventory



Chalyn (photographer): Polish Tigers baseball team, Southbridge, Mass.

ca.1935

Semi-pro baseball team originally sponsored by the Southbridge Pilsudski Polish Club, later by the Polish National Alliance, where the name was changed to the PNA team before reverting to the Polish Tigers. The team lasted about 15 years between the late 1920s and World War I. Pictured here: top row (l. to r.): Joe Migala, Fred Noga, Walter Remijan, Walter Brzys, Ray Matte, Ovie Desrosiers, Matt Mietowski, Walter Damian. Bottom row: Lou Decatalki, Andy Remian, Al Lango, Steve Liro, Ignac Zarzucki, Alex Lesniewski, and Joe Lesniewski. Eddia Wolecka, mascot.

Festival of American Folklife: Polka performance and dancing

1988 July

14 images

Snapshots of Libera and relatives dancing at the Festival of American Folklife, Southbridge.



Polka dancing snapshots

1988 July

John Libera dancing with granddaughter Krista Bajgier (age 7).



Polka dancing snapshots

1988 July

Jan Bajgier and father John Libera teaching the Domino, a figure dance done at local polka dances.

Festival of American Folklife: ephemera

1988 July

Also includes some newsclippings relating to John Libera and his son Jack and their polka performances.

Litchfield, R. M. (photographer): Polish Constitution Day celebration: girls dressed in handmade outfits



ca.1934

Images of girls who attended evening class where they studied Polish history and grammar; dressed for a parade honoring Polish Constitution Day (May 3), wearing handmade outfits. Antonia Grzesczczak, the leader, is front center in Harcerstwo uniform.

Litchfield, R. M. (photographer): Polish Women's Club (Kolko Polek Imienia Marji Konopnickiej), Southbridge, Mass.



ca.1938

Women of the Polish Women's Club dressed in comic outfits: the group had presented a play at the Pilsudski Hall in Southbridge where women played all the parts. This group was established as a benefit organization as well as a social group. Death benefits were given to members in time of need; the amount was never large, just token amounts.

Videotape: 1) Polish Tigers town 1940 (40 min.); Rededication of Kosciuszko Garden, West Point, N.Y., by Polish American Vets, Aug. 15, 1971 and Aug. 17, 1991 (35 min.); New England All-Stars Polish Orchestra, Ludlow PACC, Jan. 27, 1991 (95 min.)

1940-1991

Three vidoes.,.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of John Libera, 1985.

Processing Information

Processed by Linda Seidman, 1986, and I. Eliot Wentworth, Sept. 2015.

Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

Cite as: John Libera Collection (MS 048). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

Baseball teams--Massachusetts--Southbridge--Photographs

Polish Americans--Massachusetts--Southbridge--Photographs

Polish Constitution Day

Polka (Dance)--Photographs

Southbridge (Mass.)--Photographs

Women--Societies and clubs--Massachusetts--Southbridge--Photographs

Contributors

Libera, John [main entry]

Genres and formats

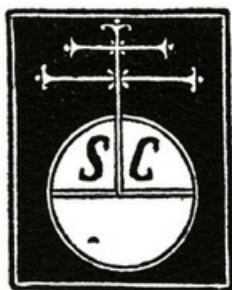
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