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Pitts, ZaSu (1894-1963), Collection, 1921-2003

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#83 Pitts, ZaSu (1894-1963), Collection, 1921-2003
8 folders

INTRODUCTION

The photos and materials in this collection are related to actress ZaSu Pitt's life, films and theatrical work. The collection is made up of photographs, clippings, programs, scripts, films, and promotions posters.

DONOR INFORMATION

The items in this collection were compiled and purchased by the Special Collections staff; it is unknown whether any of the items were donated.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

ZaSu (Zay-Soo) Pitts was born in Parsons, Kansas, on January 3, 1894. When she was the age of nine the family moved to Santa Cruz, California, for better job opportunities and nicer weather. Pitts' mother pushed her to become an actress and she spent several months imploring studio casting offices to cast her as an extra. Her first major picture was *The Little Princess* (1917) starring Mary Pickford.

She then spent several years earning a reputation for one reel comedies. This changed in 1924 when she showed the world that she could be a serious actress as she played the lead in Eric von Stoheim's *Greed*. She played a few more serious roles during the Silent Era, but reversed back to comedies when the "talkies" arrived. Her voice wasn't quite right for serious movies and many already had her typecast as a comedian. She spent the 1930s acting in Hal Roach comedies and in comedy shorts with actress Thelma Todd. She found work in vaudeville during the 1940s on the radio and on the stage. In the 1950s she shifted her focus to television and work with Gale Storm as part of a comedy duo in *The Gale Storm Show* (also known as *Oh, Susanna*).

Pitts was also an advent cook and especially enjoyed working with candy recipes. In 1963 she published those recipes in her cookbook, *Candy Hits*.

ZaSu married Tom Sarsfield Gallery in 1920. She gave birth to their daughter, ZaSu Ann Gallery. They later adopted Donald Michael Gallery when his mother, Pitts' friend, Babara La Marr died of a drug overdose. Donald was born as Marvin Carville La Marr. Pitts and Gallery divorced in 1933. Her second marriage was to John Edward Woodall in 1933 and they remained together till Pitts' death.

ZaSu was diagnosed with cancer in the mid-1950s. She continued to work, playing small roles and making cameo appearances. She played Gertie, a switchboard operator, in her last film, *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. She died shortly after making that film on June 7, 1963 and is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City, California

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The ZaSu Pitts Collection primarily contains photographs of Pitts' family, promotional photos and movie stills. There are also clippings from newspapers and magazines, programs for her plays and movies, a DVD and a 16mm film reel, scripts for two films, and promotional posters for her movies.

This collection is on-going and to accommodate future additions, each series is designated by alphabet letters, A-F, and each folder is numbered consecutively from the beginning of the collection. Each series is arranged in chronological order.

FOLDER LIST**Series A Clippings**

- f. 1 The American Home (1944)
- f. 2 CBS Television Feature (1959) and Screen Stories (1960)
- f. 3 1994-1999
- f. 4 It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963)
- f. 5 Clippings (undated)

Series B Photographs

- f. 1 Family Photos (1921-1937)
- f. 2 Promotional Photos (1924-1936)
- f. 3 Promotional Photos (undated)
- f. 4 Movie Stills (1919)
- f. 5 Movie Stills (1922-1925)
- f. 6 Movie Stills (1931-1934)
- f. 7 Movie Stills (1941-1947)
- f. 8 Movie Stills (1951)

Series C Programs

- f. 1 "Sing and Like It" (1934) and "Ramshackle Inn" (1944)
- f. 2 "The Curious Savage" (1960) and "Everybody Loves Opal" (1962)

Series D Scripts

- f. 1 "McTeague" (1899) and Pitts and Todd Short

Series E Film

- f. 1 "Broken Lullaby" (1932) and "Spy Whoops to Conquer" (16mm film)

Series F Posters

- f. 1 "Steady Company" (1932); "Sing Me A Love Song" (1936); "The Bashful Bachelor" (1942)

INDEX ENTRIES

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| "Greed" | S. A. – f. 2, f. 3, f. 5; S. B. – f. 2, f. 5 |
| "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" | S. A. – f. 2-4 |
| "Life With Father" | S. A. – f. 3; S. B. – f. 6 |
| "Mrs. Wiggs Of The Cabbage Patch" | S. A. – f. 3, f. 5; S. B. – f. 6 |
| Pitts, Za Su | Series A – Series F |
| Pickford, Mary | S. A. – f. 2, f. 3 |
| "Ramshackle Inn" | S. A. – f. 3; S. C. – f. 1 |
| Todd, Thelma | S. A. – f. 2, f. 3; S. B. – f. 6; S. D. – f. 1 |
| von Stroheim, Eric | S. A. – f. 2, f. 3, f. 5 |