



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Museum of the City of New York Receives National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to Digitize the Definitive George M. Cohan Collection

**New York, NY (April 11, 2017):** The Museum of the City of New York proudly announces a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to digitize its rich collection of scripts, sheet music, and scores created by George M. Cohan, the most prolific theater artist in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1968, thanks to two significant gifts from the Edward B. Marks Music Co., the Museum's Theater Collection has been home to original materials for 48 shows written or composed by Cohan, 20 productions he produced, and eight original comedic sketches. This grant will allow the Museum to continue its work to improve stewardship of and increase public access to its Collections through digitization.

"We are thrilled at the prospect of making it easier for people to access and experience George Cohan's unique contributions to New York City's incredible theater history," said Whitney Donhauser, *Ronay Menschel* Director of the Museum of the City of New York. "The Museum is forever grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for allowing us to share our Collections with a 21<sup>st</sup> century digital audience and strengthening the wealth of our online [Collections Portal](#)."

George Michael Cohan was born in July 1878 in Providence, Rhode Island. There is some debate about the date – Cohan claimed he was born on July 4<sup>th</sup> – and scholars have recorded both July 3<sup>rd</sup> and July 8<sup>th</sup> as his birthday. Cohan was incorporated into his parents' vaudeville act while still a baby and grew to be the principal composer and sketch writer for the family troupe, The Four Cohans. Cohan wrote, produced, directed, or starred in over 100 Broadway productions and penned such enduring hits as "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "You're a grand old flag," and "Give my regards to Broadway." Many of his works still resonate nearly 100 years later; a copy of "Over there" is currently on display in the Museum's new exhibition [Posters and Patriotism: Selling World War I in New York](#).

The Museum's Collection holds over 139 individual works written, composed, performed, or produced by Cohan, with the bulk of the material falling between 1905 and 1925. The Museum's approximately 65 cubic feet of Cohan material makes it the definitive repository on the professional life of George M. Cohan and an essential stopping point for any scholars, educators, or theatrical artists interested in the Cohan's career or early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical theater. Currently these materials are only available through onsite appointment, inhibiting access for scholars and theatrical artists who do not have the means to travel to and stay in New York City. Once digitized, this material will be freely accessible to anyone in the world with an Internet connection.

The digitization of the Museum's George M. Cohan Collection is made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Humanities Collections and Reference Resources.



### **About the Museum of the City of New York**

Founded in 1923 as a private, nonprofit corporation, the Museum of the City of New York celebrates and interprets the city, educating the public about its distinctive character, especially its heritage of diversity, opportunity, and perpetual transformation. The Museum connects the past, present, and future of New York City, and serves the people of the city as well as visitors from around the world through exhibitions, school and public programs, publications, and collections. To connect with the Museum on social media, follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and visit our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY). For more information please visit [www.mcny.org](http://www.mcny.org).

### **About the Museum's Theater Collection**

The Theater Collection at the Museum of the City of New York contains over 190,000 accessioned objects that document theatrical performance in New York City from 1785 to present day Broadway productions. The Collection contains a wide range of material types such as annotated scripts, articles, contracts, correspondence, design renderings, drawings, ephemera, memorabilia, photographs, personal papers, posters, prints, props, scores, sheet music, scrapbooks, window cards, 3-D objects, and architectural elements. With significant material on Broadway productions and related personalities, the Collection charts the expansion of commercial theater along Broadway to the establishment of the current theater district in Times Square. The story of Broadway is augmented with smaller collections on popular entertainment forms: burlesque, minstrelsy, vaudeville, and circus. Large gifts on composers and lyricists Harry B. Smith, George M. Cohan, Howard Dietz, and Betty Comden document the evolution of musical theater as an artistic form. A collection on Yiddish theater reveals how an immigrant culture created vibrant and commercially viable performance traditions that maintained a lasting impact.

Highlights include but are not limited to the papers of Mary Martin; memorabilia of George and Ira Gershwin brothers and Richard Rodgers; the working scores and scripts of George M. Cohan; the studio negatives of Lucas-Pritchard/Lucas-Monroe; handwritten draft of early plays by Eugene O'Neill; a large collection of original design renderings; and, over 40,000 photographs of theatrical production.

### **About the Collections Portal**

Launched in December 2010, the Collections Portal provides online, public access to an ever-growing portion of the Museum's collection to anyone with an internet connection. We currently offer over 185,000 records with associated images from our collection, thousands of which have never been available for public viewing. More material will be added to the Portal as imaging and cataloging work progresses. Be sure to use the magnifying glass icon below each picture to explore the images with the zoom feature - we captured the objects at an exceedingly high resolution, enabling you to investigate even the smallest details of these historic images.

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