

Finding Aid to the Henry Diekow/Baroness von Dieckoff Papers (#1992-01)

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Collection Title: Henry Diekow/Baroness von Dieckoff papers

Collection Number: 1992-01

Physical Description: 10 linear feet (three cartons, one half manuscript box, two small oversize boxes, one medium oversize box, one costume box)

Creator: Henry Diekow

Date (inclusive): 1940-1992, bulk 1940-1958, 1980-1991

Language of Material: English

Abstract: Henry William Diekow (1915-1988), also known as Baroness Eugenie von Dieckoff, was a major figure in the Imperial Court System and midcentury Bay Area drag society. Diekow's papers include photographs, honoraria, and ephemera documenting his participation in San Francisco's drag society and motorcycle clubs, as well as a complete reproduction of his gossip column-style journal, "Bag-a-Drag-by-the-Bay."

Preferred Citation:

[Identification of item], Henry Diekow/Baroness von Dieckoff papers (#1992-01), The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Conditions Governing Access:

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights:

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Acquisition Information:

The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society by Arthur Hurwith in 1992. Additional materials were donated by Jose Sarria in 1997.

Processing Information:

Finding Aid created by Chloe Pearson and Isaac Fellman in 2023.

This finding aid uses terminology for LGBTQ people that was in current use at the time of its creation. Descriptive language for queer identities evolves quickly and some of these terms may now be dated or even offensive. Finding aids are themselves historical documents; they reflect the moment in which they were written and often reflect the terms that subjects used for themselves. Please contact the GLBT Historical Society Archivist with questions or comments.

Biographical/Organizational History Note:

Several of the details included in this Biographical Note were provided by Arthur Hurwith on November 11 and December 2, 1994.

Henry William Diekow (1915-1988), also known as Baroness Eugenie von Dieckoff, was a major figure in the Imperial Court System and midcentury Bay Area drag society. Between 1940 and 1958, Diekow kept a private journal written in the style of a gossip column, which he called “Bag-a-Drag-by-the-Bay”—a play on the title of Herb Caen’s column “Baghdad by the Bay.” The journal chronicles the activities of San Francisco’s gay socialites and drag luminaries, describing events ranging from tea parties to annual balls. It also offers coded glimpses into Diekow’s personal life—for example, the Baroness is described as having married numerous times, as well as adopting a daughter.

Diekow joined the Imperial Court System, a nonprofit organization that celebrates drag culture and fundraises for San Francisco’s LGBT community, soon after its founding in 1965. He assumed a position on the Council of Empresses, but was vocal about his dislike for the politics of the Imperial Court—describing himself as “a socialite not a politician.” Diekow was involved in drag societies outside of the Bay Area, as well, such as the Golden Eagle Court of San Diego.

Diekow was a member of several early gay motorcycle clubs in the 1960s, including the San Francisco-based California Motorcycle Club and the London-based Sixty-Nine Club. Outside of his social engagements, Diekow was employed in the domestic service industry. He worked as a butler at Rose Court, the estate of Helen de Young Cameron, for thirty years. After Cameron’s death in 1969, Diekow worked as a freelance butler for the remainder of his life. He was in a romantic partnership with teacher and activist Arthur Hurwith until his death in 1988.

Scope and Content:

Diekow’s papers include photographs, honoraria, and ephemera documenting his participation in San Francisco’s drag society and motorcycle clubs. His journal, “Bag-a-Drag-by-the-Bay” (1940-1958), is an important primary source documenting pre-Imperial Court drag society. Most of the collection is related to the Imperial Court System. It includes extensive campaign and events ephemera related to the San Francisco Imperial Court as well as court systems outside of the Bay Area. The collection also includes ephemera related to San Francisco and London’s motorcycle clubs and leather culture.

Indexing Terms:

Gay men

Drag

Imperial Court System

Motorcycle clubs

Container Listing**Box 1**

- 1:1 Tavern Guild - Bylaws and minutes
- 1:2 The Council of Empresses - Administration and correspondence
- 1:3 Royal and Imperial Procession - Organizational notes
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- 1:5 Emperor II Russ, 1973-1974
- 1:6 Emperor III Bob Cramer, 1974-1975
- 1:7 Emperor IV Michael Caringi, 1975-1976
- 1:8 Emperor V Hector Navarro, 1976-1977
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- 1:10 Emperor VII Bob Ross, 1978-1979
- 1:11 Emperor VIII Chuck Demmon, 1979-1980
- 1:12 Emperor XV and Patrick McGonicle and Empress XXII Tina Tanner, 1987-1988
- 1:13 San Francisco Imperial Court Directories - including 1977
- 1:14 Correspondence within the San Francisco Imperial Court - circa 1976-1991
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- 1:16 Official Candidate Review Board for Emperor and Empress of San Francisco, 1983
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- 1:18 Privy Council - Administration, 1979
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- 1:20 Privy Council - Correspondence, 1979-1981
- 1:21 The Linda Lovelash Fan Club, 1980s
- 1:22 Command Performance in Reverse - San Francisco Imperial Court Screenplay
- 1:23 Henry William Dieckoff: Three faces of the Baroness
- 1:24 Poem
- 1:25 San Francisco Motorcycle Club - bylaws, 1966
- 1:26 London Motorcycle Club and related ephemera, 1976-1986
- 1:27 Bound collection of newspaper clippings on socialites - created by Dieckoff
- 1:28 Miscellaneous newspaper photographs
- 1:29 "Bag a Drag by the Bay" (reproduction) - series of columns compiled by Dieckoff
- 1:30 "Bag a Drag by the Bay" (original) [missing]
- 1:31 Bound clippings of female impersonators (original) compiled by Dieckoff
- 1:32 Clippings of female impersonators (reproduction)
- 1:33 Jose Sarria - Black Cat, 1978
- 1:34 Campaign ephemera, Imperial Court System

1:35 Social ephemera, Imperial Court System

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2:38 Motorcycle Club ephemera, San Francisco
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Photographs

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Plaque, Mama Peck - Queen Mother IV of California
“Window Shade” proclamation, announcing Imperial Court event

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4:50 Checkbook, circa 1987-1990
4:51 Franciscan Mission Association membership grant, circa 1980s
4:52 Henry Diekow Sr. memoir manuscript, 1970, and professional history, circa 1940s
4:53 Letter of condolence from San Francisco County Board of Supervisors to Hurwith, 1988
4:54 Photographs, circa 1930s-1970s, clothing auction flyer, undated, and other material
4:55 Photograph of the Baroness with Oliver, undated
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Plaque, Empress de Tijuana, 1991
Decorative metal panel, 1902

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Certificates of Appreciation from Grand Duke Tony Trevizo and Grand Duchess Deena Jones (2), circa 1986
Scrapbook about Countess Helen Gratzos, 1944-1962
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Plaque, Honorary Citizen de Rio Tijuana, undated
Imperial Court campaign matchbooks
“Lily Street for Empress” campaign key and matching earrings

Box 6

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- 6:75 International Court Conference V and VI documents and AIDS memorial quilt application, 1987
- 6:76 Imperial Court campaign ephemera and newspaper clippings, 1987-1988
- 6:77 Miscellaneous Imperial Court materials, circa 1980s
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- 6:79 Privy Council documents
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- 6:81 Personal correspondence
- 6:82 Flyers and programs, Imperial Court events

Oversized Box 1

Most oversize materials pertain to the Imperial Court, including posters and flyers for events (some autographed), newspaper clippings about the Imperial Court, an autographed drawing, and a proclamation from Emperor Russ, circa 1974-1979

Costume Box

Russian gown, with accouterments