

Records of the Azalea Festival Committee, 1934–1953

The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library

Compiled by Nicholas Butler, Ph.D., Manager, 2007

Collation: 1.5 linear feet.

Description: The records consist of newspaper clippings (1934–1953), correspondence (1934–1936), ephemera (1935–1941), financial records (1935–1941), meeting minutes (1935–1936), programming materials, publicity materials (1935–1936), a scrapbook of newspaper clippings (1941), and a script for a pageant (1936).

The programming materials consist of lists of committee members, programs, and plans. The correspondence is arranged by topic: financial, general, historical pageant, and mayor's luncheon. Ephemera from the pageant includes stationary, programs, flyers, entertainment publicity packages and photographs, party supply catalogs, and copies of "The Azalea Waltz," the theme song of Charleston's Azalea Festival. Financial records include ledger books, budgets, bills, and vouchers. Other materials include a copy of the script of a historical pageant, *From Charles Town to Charleston*, written for the 1936 Azalea Festival; press releases; and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about the 1941 Azalea Festival.

Historical Note: The City of Charleston presented the first Azalea Festival in March 1934, after Robert Bradham proposed the festival as a means of expanding tourism and establishing a rival to New Orleans's Mardi Gras festivities. In 1937 the nine-day Azalea Festival was shortened to one week, and the date changed to April. World War II caused the festival to be suspended from 1942 through 1946. The Charleston Challenges Bureau revived the festival in 1947, and that year the city transferred administrative and financial responsibilities to the Azalea Festival Association, a private organization (whose records are not included here). The 1951 festival was cancelled due to the Korean War, but it was revived in 1952. The final Azalea Festival occurred in April 1953.

The Azalea Festival consisted of events ranging from parades, lancing tournaments, and boxing matches to air shows, water shows, and historical pageants, with notable figures such as Tommy Dorsey's Orchestra providing entertainment. A Mayor's Luncheon at the Francis Marion Hotel was a highlight in the early years, with a guest list in the hundreds, including state and national VIPs. The 1938 festival proved to be a banner year. Vice-President John Garner and two hundred congressmen, including then Senator Harry Truman, attended via private railcars from Washington. Throughout its history, the highlight of the festival was the crowning of the Azalea Queen, selected during a beauty pageant of queens from across the state, and the Coronation Ball. Of particular note was Mary Daniels of Gaffney, Queen Azalea II in 1935, who became a Hollywood film star and married actor Robert Cummings in 1945.

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Collection Outline:

- BOX 1: Clippings, 1934–1953 (incomplete)
 Programming materials, 1935–1936
 Minutes, 1935–1936
- BOX 2: Correspondence, 1934–1936
 General: 1934–36
 Financial: 1936
 Historical Pageant: 1935–36
 Mayor’s Luncheon: 1934–36
- BOX 3: Ephemera, 1935–1941
 Financial records, 1935, 1936, 1941
 Script: *From Charles Town to Charleston: A Pageant for the Charleston
 Azalea Festival* (1936)
 Publicity materials, 1935–1936
 Scrapbook, 1941