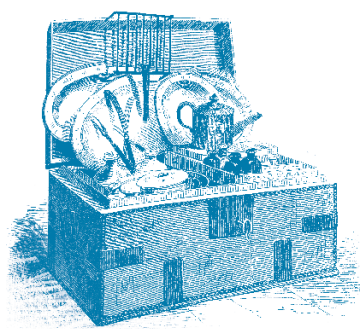


UP FRONT



CURATOR'S CORNER

By Emily Ruby, Curator

The Singing Sisters

During the golden age of radio and vaudeville, two sisters made quite a name for themselves as local performers. They could be found throughout the papers in the late 1920s, as they were called “one of the most popular teams of radio entertainers in the radio realm.”¹ But just as quickly, their names disappeared from the newspapers and the sisters’ story would have slipped into obscurity if not for a 1996 donation by Catherine Wallisch Bauer to the History Center shortly before her death.

The note that came with the collection does not give us much information. It simply states that Emma and her sister Catherine were a popular singing duo in the late 1920s and early '30s. The collection consists of one dress, one pantsuit, and a small archival collection of newspaper clippings and a photograph of the girls in the dresses.

More information about the sisters can be gleaned from newspapers and ancestry records. In the late 1920s the sisters are frequently listed as evening performers on station WCAE and on stage at local variety and vaudeville shows. Called a “harmonizing duo,” Catherine performed as a soprano and Emma a contralto. Emma would often play the piano



The Wallisch Sisters in their matching dresses, c. 1927.
HHC Detre L&A, 1996.0301.



Wallisch sisters' dress donated to the History Center, c. 1927.
HHC Collections, gift of Catherine Wallisch Bauer, 96.207.2. Photo by Liz Simpson.

and sing the melody while Catherine sang the harmony on the compositions they arranged. They usually performed together, but there are instances of them performing solo and as a part of “Harmony Trio.” Most often they performed a review of popular songs of the day and were known for taking requests as well as for their “unique and clever” interpretations

of popular songs.²

The Wallisch sisters were never formally trained as musicians but learned on their own. They grew up at 2619 Josephine Street on the South Side and attended St. Peter's Parochial School. Their father Anthony worked as a laborer in a local iron works according to the 1910 census and died four years later from

WCAE ARTISTS IN ROXY PROGRAM.



At left is seen Olga Mundy; right, Ben Fields; upper center, the Wallisch Sisters; lower, Ernest Babcock, who will be participants in the

Roxy program at the second annual radio show at the Du on Tuesday night.

FEATURE ARTISTS IN WCAE BROADCAST



Above are pictured the highlights in tonight's broadcast from WCAE. Upper left, Mary Garden, who will feature in the General Motors "family party";

at right, the Wallisch Sisters, whose program will be heard at 8 o'clock. Lower row, Al Steele and his Vagabonds, heard by WCAE listeners at 7 o'clock.



tuberculosis. Both of their parents were of German descent with their mother, Rosa, being born in Bavaria. Rosa was known in the neighborhood as "Mother Wallisch" because she cooked for many of the popular summer camps in the 1920s. Emma, born in 1900, was the older of the two by five years. They also had two older siblings, Elmer and Dorothy. Elmer operated a crane in the iron works.

After being absent from the newspapers for about a decade, the sisters reappear in 1941. On Saturday, March 24, 1941, it was announced that the sisters wore matching "navy blue ensembles, orchard corsages and tiny hats made of real gardenias" for their double wedding at St. Peter's Catholic Church on the South Side followed by a breakfast at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association.³ On the Tuesday before, a bridge-supper party at the Hotel Roosevelt was held in honor of the sisters' upcoming nuptials. Emma married Joseph Schulte of Mount Washington, a 45-year-old salesman, and Catherine married Anthony Bauer, a 38-year-old clerk from the

South Side. The Schultes honeymooned in Miami while the Bauers went on a tour of the west. After their honeymoons, they all lived together at the girls' childhood home on Josephine Street.

At the time of her marriage at the age of 40, Emma listed her occupation as being a stenographer at the courthouse. Thirty-five-year-old Catherine listed her occupation as a clerk with the credit bureau. It is unclear when and why they stopped performing, but because of their donation we will always remember these two sisters who became a local sensation if but for a brief time.

¹ *The Pittsburgh Press*, Thursday, Dec. 1, 1927, p. 16.

² "Mary Garden in WCAE Broadcast" *The Pittsburgh Press*, Nov. 21, 1927, p. 28.

³ "Dual Bridal: Sisters Wear Identical Nuptial Ensembles" *The Pittsburgh Press*, Sunday, May 25, 1941, p. 26.

BART RICHARDS
1816 1-2 S. MILL STREET
NEW CASTLE, PENNA.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HARRISBURG, PA.

COMMITTEES
Military
Public Health and Sanitation
Education
Post Office and Pensions
Labor and Industry
Revenue

November 5, 1927.

Miss Emma Wallisch,
2619 Josephine Street,
S.S. Pittsburgh, Pa.

My Dear Miss Wallisch:-

I am sending you herewith a clipping of my story in the New Castle News of today. I thoroughly enjoyed your work of Thursday evening and hope to have the pleasure of hearing you and your talented sister again in the near future.

In the meantime may I suggest that both of you keep working at the talent which is yours? You have something which the public wants and nobody can do anything for you more than your selves.

My warmest wishes for your success,

Sincerely,

Bart Richards