

Burlesque Research Guide.

With original materials dating from 1848-1972.

Compiled by Dixie Johnson

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Brief history of Burlesque 1840-1929

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<https://ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=89160853&site=eds-live&scope=site>

Contemporary American burlesque is associated with erotic female dancing, but in the early nineteenth century, a burlesque was a short playlet within a variety show that commonly ridiculed a more serious drama or play. Burlesque was also a standard part of minstrel shows since about 1840. In the 1850s, a growing middle and working class were lured to variety theatre while drama and opera were left to the educated elite. In 1881, Tony Pastor opened his New Fourteenth Street Theater in New York. While Pastor separated his entertainment from elite forms, he drew a more respectable audience than did the concert saloons by eliminating alcohol, spitting, and swearing and otherwise controlling audience behavior. Pastor's initial performance, however, was not variety but burlesque, a short play mocking the fashionable art of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. Minstrel show and burlesque were also popular in Britain. In 1868, Lydia Thompson and her travelling English burlesque artists shocked New York with her burlesque *Ixion: Or, The Man at the Wheel*.

While American variety shows, vaudeville and burlesque began in eastern cities, advances in railroad and water transportation made it possible for showmen to envision the entire country as a potential market. These advances also led to national publicity, essential for the creation of a star system. Edward Franklin Albee and Benjamin Franklin Keith helped create a national industry for vaudeville entertainment. Meeting during the mid-1880's, the two men shared a common vision of creating and exploiting a mass market by assembling a sufficient variety of acts to appeal to audiences of any type, anywhere. They built theaters that were massive and elegant, designed to give audiences the impression that, for a few hours, they lived in luxury. Their theaters were physically clean as well. At a time when "purity" and "cleanliness" sold merchandise of all types, Keith and Albee attested to the moral rectitude of their shows, but their set of regulations primarily governed performers' language and behavior. Where the market would tolerate it, largely in urban centers where middle-class women were familiar with the sensational women's novels of the period, the shows included lively female acts. The most notable of these was Eva Tanguay, the "I Don't Care" girl, representative of an increasing subversion of Victorian sexual stereotypes.

At first, Keith and Albee's circuit was only one of several competing circuits, but, by 1900, eastern and western vaudeville circuits were controlled by Keith and Albee working as the Association of Vaudeville Managers of the United States. The association collected a percentage of every performer's salary; performers had to provide their own costumes, sets, casts, and materials. The 1906 creation of the United Booking Office of America gave Keith and Albee virtual control of vaudeville engagements. Attempts at unionization against their management failed, because, despite their controls, aspiring performers were eager to join the circuit. Primarily the children of poverty, performers found in vaudeville the promise of remarkable salaries and futures beyond the dreams of their immigrant parents. Keith and Albee could arrange better schedules than individual performers could negotiate by themselves and could provide steady work for the most successful among them.

Burlesque only briefly offered such a promise. Lydia Thompson's *Ixion* was well received at first, when it opened at George Wood's Museum and Menagerie, sponsored by Barnum. Censors soon

attacked, however. In a day when the ideal woman of the middle and upper classes was gentle, modest, self-effacing, slim, and fully clothed, Thompson's entertainers were large, self-dramatizing, and wore tights; they were heavysset, for heavier women were considered beauties by the undernourished poor. Would-be censors described the appearance of these women on stage as a step toward the collapse of society. Laura Keane, who opened *Seven Sisters* in 1870, also shocked the public; women played both male and female parts.

With such productions, "burlesque" lost its original meaning and became associated with the display of female bodies. Michael Bennett Leavitt, Polish immigrant and minstrel endman, is credited with organizing the first deliberate female burlesque. Minstrel shows no longer drew audiences, so Leavitt turned his minstrels into a female burlesque company. Women made up the chorus in the first part of the show, which was known as *Mme Rentz's Female Minstrel Show* (1870).

The *Rentz-Santley Novelty and Burlesque Show* began a ten-year run in 1871, and, although stars Mabel Santley and May Howard showed no more than their ankles, their performances were considered immoral. Audiences were increasingly made up of men and some poorer women. As fashions in women's dress changed and even respectable women revealed more flesh than in the past, burlesque itself changed. Attempts at "clean" burlesque generally failed. Burlesque became even less inhibited with the introduction of the "cooch" dance at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. This led to the introduction of belly dancing in burlesque and, as that fashion lost its power to shock, of the striptease. Burlesque was no longer a respectable form of entertainment. Neither was it socially subversive. Women such as Eva Tanguay, whose performances represented an increasing demand for empowerment by middle- and working-class women, were to be found in vaudeville. Apart from an occasional female comedian, burlesque women generally were silent, simply furnishing a physical spectacle for the pleasure of men.

Burlesque and vaudeville began to fail in the 1920's. Especially after the Great Depression of 1929, audiences were drawn away to the newer and cheaper entertainment provided by films and, later, radio. Nonetheless, the effect of vaudeville and burlesque on later mass entertainment was enormous. Florenz Ziegfeld borrowed some aspects of burlesque for his fabulous *Follies* reviews, which began in 1907. His showgirls revealed their bodies, but he made these productions respectable by hiring innocent young girls who could at least pass as middle or upper class, providing them with expensive costumes, and ensuring that their performances were seductive, not subversive. In doing so, Ziegfeld pointed the direction for early musical films.

Burlesque Bibliography

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Special Collections

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Burlesque Sheet Music

“Beautiful Bells & Bell goes ringing for Sarah” 1869

Collection- Sheet music, Loc BYULG 037, ID 002826-BYULG

“Lydia Thompson Quadrilles” 1869

Collection- Sheet music, Loc BYULG 037, ID 002823-BYULG

(For picture, see A1)

“Eva Tanguay’s love song, signed” 1904

Collection- Sheet music, Loc CPMLG 051, ID 003959-CPMLG

(For picture, see A2)

“I don’t care”

Collection- Sheet music, Loc CPMSM 116, ID 014976-CPMSM

(For picture, see A3)

“Strip polka” 1942

Collection- Sheet music, Loc AVERY 021, ID 001628-AVERY

(For picture, see A4)

“A beautiful wife” 1908

Collection- Sheet music, Loc SHOWLG 014, ID 045127-SHOW

Series, the merry widow

(For picture, see A5)

Additional findings:

“Carry Me Back” 1849

Collection- Sheet music, Loc CPMLG 047, ID003567-CPMLG

“Carnival of Venice, Op. 22” 1852

Collection- Sheet music, Loc VOL 2, ID 000059-SMVOL

Series, A. Jaell’s compositions

“The Laura Keene Schottisch” 1856

Collection- Sheet music, Loc BYULG 035, ID 002566-BYULG

Series, “Thomas Baker’s New and Popular Music”

“Beautiful bells” 1868

Collection- Sheet music, Loc BYULG 004, ID 000272-BYULG/000273-BYULG
Series, “Field of the Cloth of Gold (burlesque)”

“Miss Lydia Thompson’s favorite polka and march” 1869

Collection- Sheet music, Loc BYULG 042, ID 003227-BYULG
(For picture, see A6)

“Tell us pretty ladies” 1901

Collection- Sheet music, Loc SHOWLG 006, ID 017901-SHOW

“Opera burlesque” 1912

Collection- Sheet music, Loc SHOWLG 029, ID 077302-SHOW
Series, Weber Field jubilee

“The jesters” 1972

Collection- Sheet music, Loc ORCHS 43, ID 001122-ORCHS
Series, “Capitol Photoplay Series, p 82”

Burlesque Songsters

“Columbia burlesque songster” 1924

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), ID SP-040590

(For picture, see A7)

“New Rentz--Santley”

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 29, ID SP-085760

Series- Casket of gems, no. 17

(For picture, see A8)

“The night owls songster” 1889

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 29, ID SP-085768

(For picture, see A9)

“Bonnie Runnell’s” 1881

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 21, ID SP-085427

(For picture, see A10)

“Mistress Jinks burlesque songster” 1869

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 28, ID SP-085736

(For picture, see A11)

“Let me hug her for her mother” 1869

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 38, ID SP-086112

(For picture, see A12)

“Ada Wray’s Good Bye Charlie Songster” 187?

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 37, ID SP-086077

(For picture, see A13)

“The big sun-flower songster” 1868

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 37, ID SP-086066

(For picture, see A14)

“The Jardin Mabile songster” 1869

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 10, ID SP-085156

(For picture, see A15)

Additional findings:

“White’s new illustrated melodeon” 1848

Collection- Rare Books and Scores (songster), Loc Box 35, ID SP-085997

Burlesque Playbills

“The black crook” 1872

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000238-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 140

“Buckley’s Serenaders”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000076-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 32

“Lisa Weber’s Burlesque Troupe”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000094-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 43

“Robin hood, Lydia Thomspen”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000226-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 129

“Lizzette Bernard’s Blondes and Brunettes”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000108-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 50

“Sophie Worrell”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000092-SCRAPBOOK,
p. 41

“Fanny Herring, Ixion”

Collection- Posters, Playbills, Programs, Loc Performance Scrapbook No. 1, ID 000157-SCRAPBOOK

Burlesque Broadsides

“Burlesque political stump speech”

Collection - broadsides,

<http://musicman.mtsu.edu/broadsides/Binder4/JPEGmed/0892brom.jpg>

“Baby’s lullaby”

Collection- broadsides, loc binder 19, item 94 BROAD-005639

Pictorial Appendix

A1: "Lydia Thompson Quadrilles" 1869, ID 002823-BYULG

1790
1/2

002823-BYULG

LYDIA THOMPSON
QUADRILLES



INTRODUCING THE POPULAR MELODIES OF
"TOMMY DODD" "WALKING IN THE PARK"
"Beautiful Bells." "The Bell goes a ringing for Sarah."
"HE'S A PAL O' MINE" - & "UP IN A BALLOON."

By
CHARLES SPRAUT

BOSTON.
PUBLISHED BY **O. DITSON & CO.** 277 WASHINGTON ST.

NEW YORK.
C. H. DITSON & CO.

BOSTON.
J. C. HAYES & CO.

CHICAGO.
LYON & HEALY.

PHILADELPHIA.
C. W. A. TRUMPLER.

CINCINNATI.
J. CHURCH JR.

5

ENTERED AS SECOND-CLASS MATTER IN THE FALLING BY O. DITSON & CO. IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF MASS.

A2: "Eva Tanguay's love song, signed" 1904, ID 003959-CPMLG

003959-CPM76

Eva Tanguay's Love Song

Eight Encores Nightly



EVA TANGUAY

Words and Music by
Melville S. Gollins

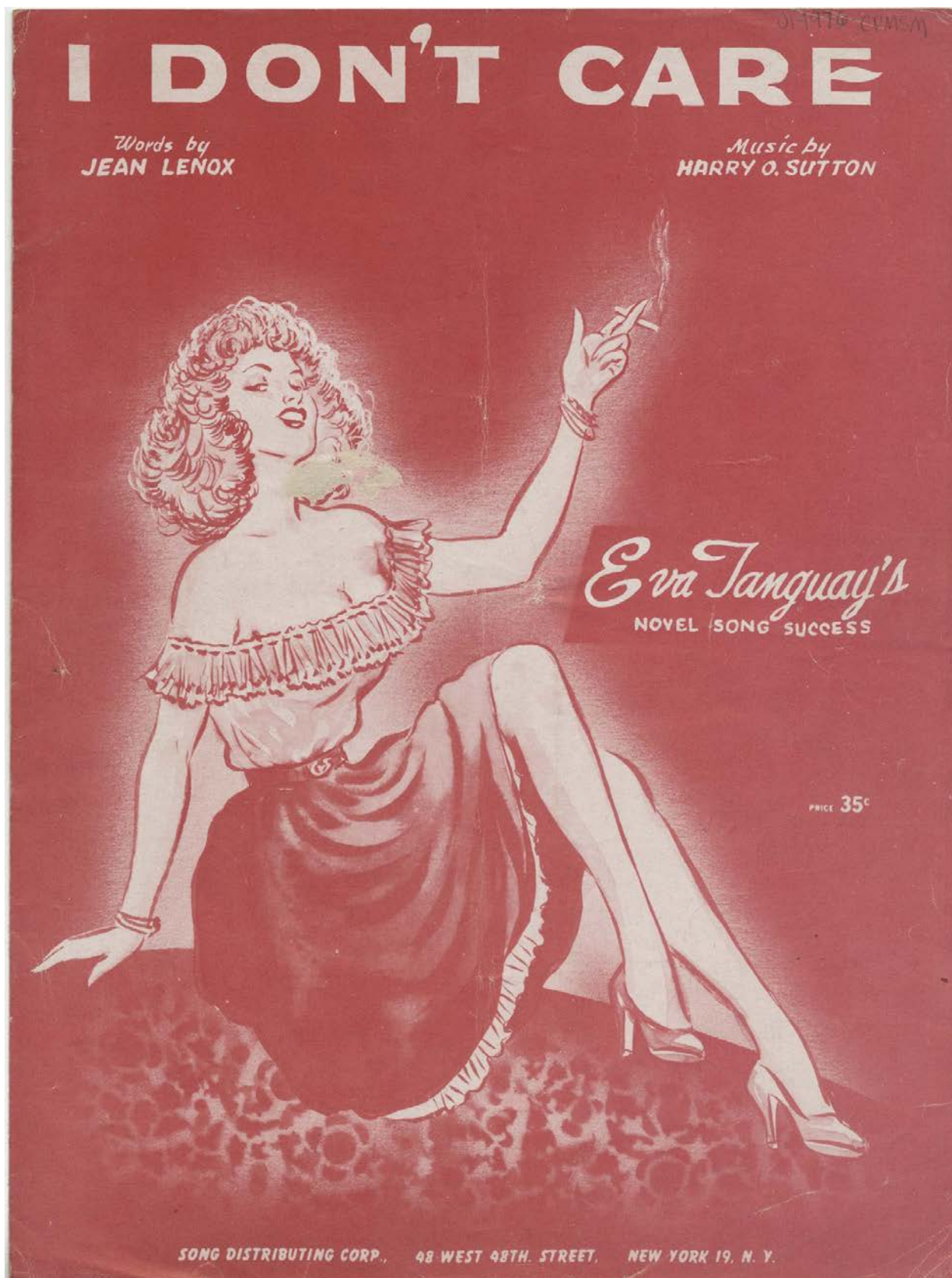
Published by
MELVILLE S. GOLLINS
95 Garfield Place
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

5

*Compliments
Melville S. Gollins*

FREDERICK HOLLWORTH & BRO., MUSIC PRINTERS, MILWAUKEE

A3: "I don't care," ID 014976-CPMSM



A4: "Strip polka" 1942, ID 001628-AVERY

STRIP POLKA

by
JOHNNY MERCER



"TAKE IT OFF"



"TAKE IT OFF"



"TAKE IT OFF"

featured by
THE ANDREWS SISTERS

Recorded by
JOHNNY MERCER
THE ANDREWS SISTERS
KAY KYSER
ALVINO REY

EDWIN H. MORRIS & COMPANY
INC.
music publishers
1619 BROADWAY • NEW YORK, N. Y.

A5: "A beautiful wife" 1908, ID 045127-SHOW

10-009

JOE WEBER'S

045127-SHOW

BURLESQUE OF THE MERRY WIDOW

AS PRESENTED
AT JOE WEBER'S MUSIC HALL
29TH ST. & BROADWAY, NEW YORK
BY PERMISSION OF HENRY W. SAVAGE
MUSICAL NUMBERS

I LOVE YOU SO	60¢
VILIA	60¢
MAXIM'S	60¢
WOMEN	60¢
THE CAVALIER	60¢
A BEAUTIFUL WIFE (KNOWN AS A DUTIFUL WIFE)	60¢
THERE ONCE WERE TWO MUTTFACED CHILDREN	60¢
(KNOWN AS THERE ONCE WERE TWO PRINCE'S CHILDREN)	
THE MERRY WIDOW WALTZ	60¢

The illustration depicts a woman in a black, high-collared dress and a black hat, holding a large bundle of money tied with colorful ribbons. She is surrounded by several men in top hats and a man in a military uniform with a mustache. The scene is set against a plain background.

A6: "Miss Lydia Thompson's favorite polka and march" 1869, ID 003227-BYULG

003227-67066

Miss
Louisa Thompson's



FAVORITE
 POLKA
 AND
 MARCH,

BY
 CHARLES
 KINKEL.

POLKA (5) MARCH.

Published by **J. L. PETERS,** New York.

T. A. BOYLE. SAINT LOUIS.	DOBMEYER & NEWHALL. CINCINNATI.	MATTHIAS GRAY. SAN FRANCISCO & PORTLAND, OR.	C. J. WHITNEY & CO. DETROIT.	T. GOGGAN & BRO. GALVESTON.
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Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1852, by J. L. Peters in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

SNYDER & BLACK, 92 WILLIAM ST. N. Y.

A7: "Columbia burlesque songster" 1924, ID SP-040590



A8: "New Rentz--Santley," ID SP-085760

CASKET OF GEMS. PRICE 10 CTS

NEW

17

RENTS
SANTLEY
Novelty
BURLESQUE
Company

SONGS OF THE MIKADO

POPULAR
PUB. CO.
37 BOND ST.
NEW YORK

A vintage sheet music cover for 'Songs of the Mikado'. The central illustration depicts a woman in a red and white costume, possibly a geisha or a character from the play, holding a large, ornate vase. To her left is a decorative pedestal with a vase. The background is filled with stylized text and musical symbols. At the top, it says 'CASKET OF GEMS. PRICE 10 CTS'. Below that, 'NEW' is written in a decorative font. The title 'SONGS OF THE MIKADO' is at the bottom. The publisher's information, 'POPULAR PUB. CO. 37 BOND ST. NEW YORK', is in the bottom right corner. A vertical strip on the right side contains various musical symbols and a small figure of a cherub.

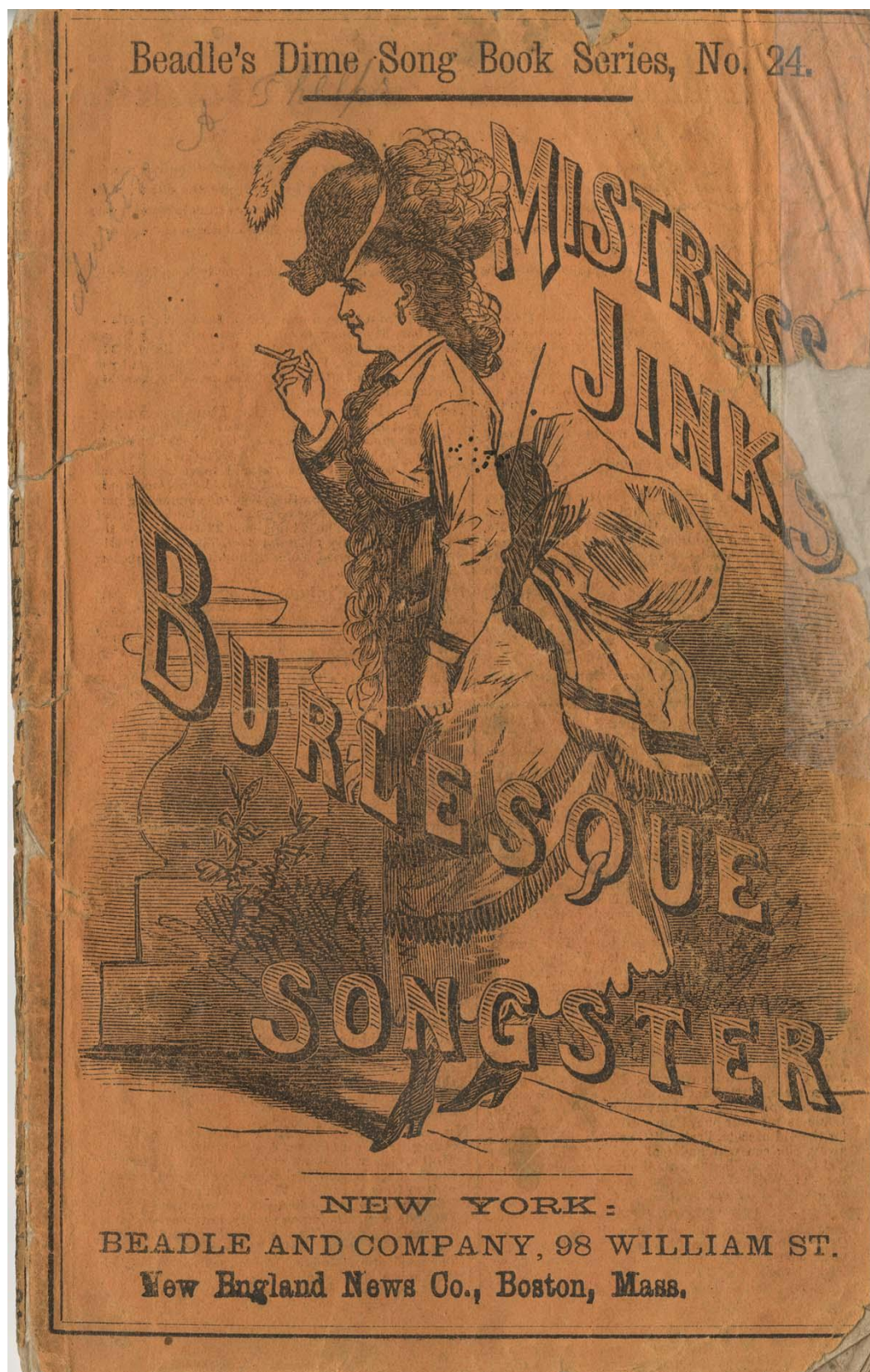
A9: "The night owls songster" 1889, ID SP-085768



A10: "Bonnie Runnell's" 1881, ID SP-085427



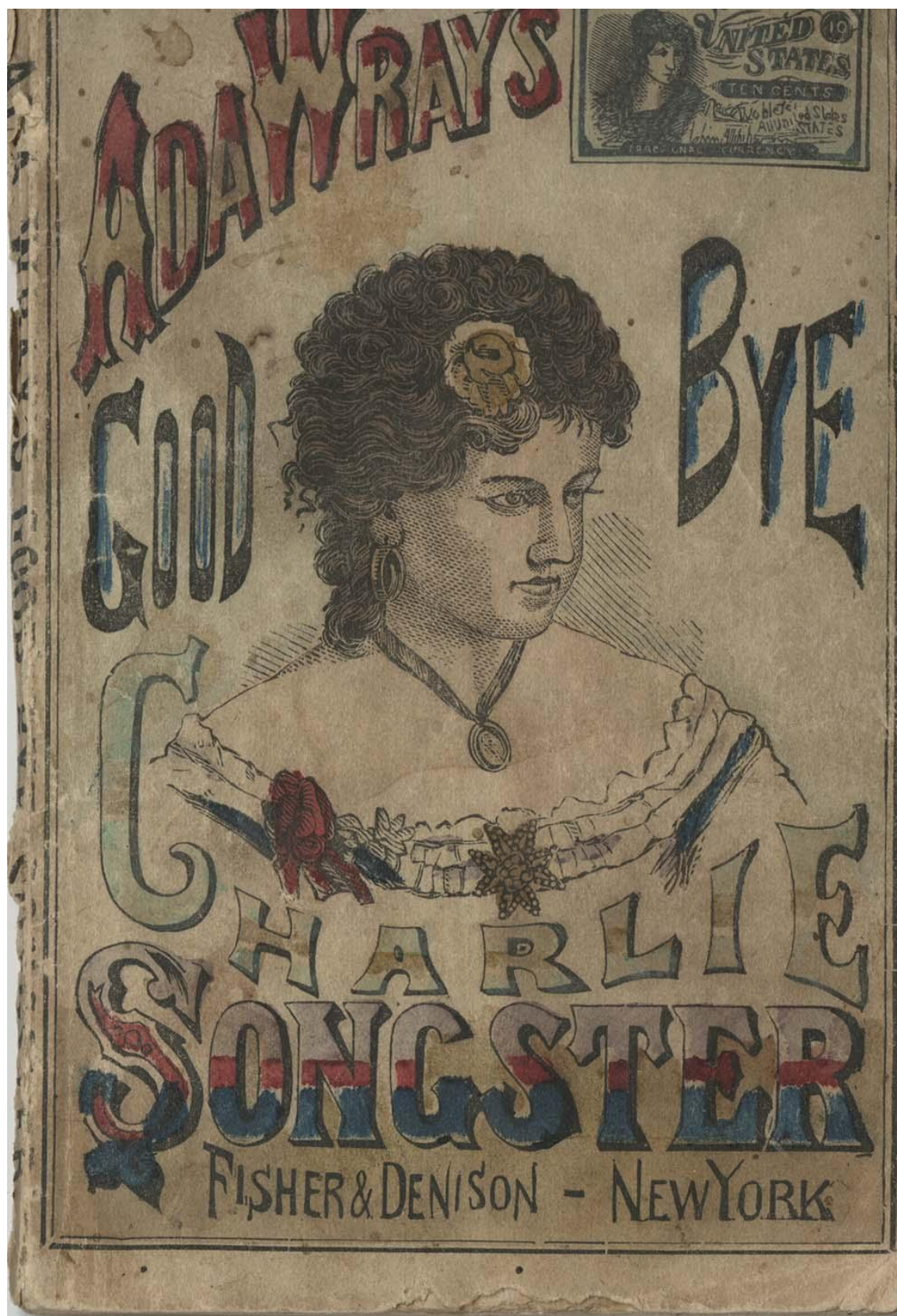
A11: "Mistress Jinks burlesque songster" 1869, ID SP-085736



A12: "Let me hug her for her mother" 1869, ID SP-086112



A13: "Ada Wray's Good Bye Charlie Songster" 187?, ID SP-086077



A14: "The big sun-flower songster" 1868, ID SP-086066



A15: "The Jardin Mabile songster" 1869, ID SP-085156



JARDIN

MABILLE

SONGS

FISHER
& DENISON
NEW YORK.

