

Collection Name:

Theodora Cormontan papers, 1863-2013

Collection Number:

P1726

Extent:

1 flat box

Biography/History:

Theodora Cormontan (June 9, 1840–October 26, 1922) was a Norwegian-American singer, pianist, church musician, composer, and music publisher, recognized as one of the first Norwegian women to have her classical compositions widely published and performed, and among the earliest women to establish a music publishing business in Norway. Born in Beitstad, Norway, to a Lutheran pastor, she grew up in Arendal, where she began her musical training before continuing her studies in Copenhagen. After an early career as a soprano and pianist, including a successful Norwegian concert tour in 1869. She returned to Arendal, where she composed extensively for piano and voice, performed widely, and founded a music lending library. From 1879 to 1886, she operated her own publishing house, notable for promoting the works of women composers and for distributing music throughout Scandinavia and beyond.

Economic hardship following a bank failure and a devastating fire forced Cormontan to sell her business and emigrate to the United States in 1887. Settling in Minnesota, she continued her musical career as a pianist, organist, teacher, choir director, and composer, despite a serious train accident that ended her singing career. Active in Norwegian-American church life, she composed hymns and other works that remained popular despite ecclesiastical controversy, including her best-known hymn, "Høgt frå den himmelske klåra," which endures in Norwegian hymnals today. After years of declining family fortunes, she spent her final years in a Norwegian Lutheran home in Decorah, Iowa. Following her death, her music largely disappeared from public view until the rediscovery of her manuscripts in 2011, leading to renewed performances, recordings, and recognition of her lasting contribution to Norwegian and Norwegian-American musical culture.

Scope and Content:

This collection contains several original pieces of sheet music as well as published material, photographs, biographic information, and a significant amount of digital material.

Access Rights:

This collection is open to research.

Bibliographic Citation:

[Indicate the cited item here]. Theodora Cormotan Papers. Norwegian American Historical Association, Northfield, Minnesota.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Web content flash drive
1	2	Music CD
1	3	Music list and biographic information, 2013
1	4	Published sheet music (some in Norwegian, some in English)
1	5	Photographs, 1863-2011 Includes family, friends, homes, grave sites, Schmidts, and Cormontans.
1	6	Clippings and programs, undated
1	7	Sheet music, 1895-1906 Titles: Summer Day, Dance of the Flower Girls, Waltz Gracious, Spanish Dance, Ninetta Polkette, Danse de la Duchesse.