

# Guide to the Theater Manuscripts Collection

MS 667



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

May 1980

Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 667

**TITLE:** Theater manuscripts collection

**DATES:** 1784-1941

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 6.75 linear feet (12 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Correspondence, autographs, playbills, notebooks, and writings relating to the American theater and the history of theater in New Haven, Connecticut, as collected by Jack Crawford, Mary Hamlin and others.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0667>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0667>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Crawford, Mary Hamlin, Yale University School of Drama, and others.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

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## Preferred Citation

Theater Manuscripts Collection (MS 667). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Existence and Location of Copies

Scrapbook on "The Gypsy Trail," a play by Robert Housum available on microfilm (147 frames on 1 reel, 35mm.) from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, at cost. Order no. HM102.

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## Related Materials

Crawford Theater Collection (MS 1387). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Jack Randall Crawford Papers (MS 153). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Scope and Contents

The Theater Manuscripts Collection consists of correspondence, autographs, playbills, theatrical notebooks and several drafts for the WPA Writers Project. The correspondence ranges from such eminent tragedians as Edwin Booth and E.H. Sothorn to such minor comedians as Yankee Robinson and Joe Flynn. While the majority of correspondents are American, a few important letters were written by British and European actors. Of particular interest are Sir James Matthew Barrie's letter to Frederick Harrison enlisting his support in a protest against governmental censorship of plays; several letters by Benjamin Webster and Dame Ellen Terry; Giuseppe Verdi's note to his publisher Ricordi mentioning "La Traviata."

The collection contains the letters of such noted American theatrical families as the Wallacks and the Chippendales. There are fragmentary records of Edwin Booth's financial dealings and several P.T. Barnum letters appear in the collection. The greater part of the correspondence is composed of notes written by various "vaudevillians" to Albert Emmett Fostell, an old time song and dance man; August Heckler, the editor of a New York dramatic news; or John Holmes, a New Jersey Theater manager. A few letters are addressed to John B. Wright, manager of the Forbes Theater, Washington, at the time of Lincoln's assassination. Most of the letters are from the period 1825 and 1905. However, more contemporary correspondence includes letters from Sherwood Anderson, Frederic March, Dame May Whitty and Monty Woolley. There is a letter from Thornton Wilder concerning the trials of the "Skin of Our Teeth." In a short note, John Galsworthy explains his position on anti-semitism.

The autographs include signatures of Maude Adams, David Belasco, Edwin Booth, John Drew, William Gillette, Joseph Jefferson, Richard Mansfield, Conde Nast, James O'Neill, Adelina Putti, E.H. Sothorn and Otis Skinner.

The Theatrical notebooks in Box 10 are essentially lists of antiquated comedies, tragedies, and melodramas. Along with these items is a copy of an anonymous play, "The Smuggler."

The WPA Writers project is composed almost entirely of notes and background material dealing with the growth of Theater in New Haven. The notes have been condensed into two papers, 1941, entitled "History of the New Haven Theater; 18th Century" (of which there are some ten copies: one typewritten, some manuscript, some incomplete) and "Disputes, Dialogues, and Plays: 18th Century" (one complete). Among the notes are a play 1784 "Dialogue At Oration Day"; a manual of research procedure for investigating New

Haven Theater; a history of the Linonian, Brothers in Unity and Calliopean Societies, including the comedies and tragedies acted by these groups; and some pages of notes on Nathan Hale's theatrical propensities.

The value of this collection lies not so much in the few letters of renowned actors, actresses and playwrights as in the consistent picture it gives of Theatrical life in the late 19th century. A life lived in hotels and rented rooms comes vividly alive in such items as Al Fostelle's paen to the boarding house and Joe Flynn's doggerel in praise of the New York *Clipper*. The sense of the uncertainty and impermanence of a 19th century stage career found in these manuscripts coupled with the unique flavor of "old time" Theater, makes this collection valuable for the Historian of the Theater.

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## **Arrangement**

Arranged by type of material.

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## Collection Contents

### Inventory, 1784-1941

Correspondence		
b. 1	A-Dic	
b. 2	Dim-H	
b. 3	I-Roba	
b. 4	Robb-Yo; Unidentified	
b. 5	Autographs	
b. 6	Theater notebooks	
b. 6	Play: "The Smuggler"	
W.P.A. Writers' Project, "History of the New Haven Theater"		
b. 7	Research material and drafts	
b. 10, 9, 8, 11	Notecards	
b. 12	Programs and printed memorabilia	
b. 12	Charles Robert Housum, "The Gypsy Trail": items removed from scrapbook	1917-1919
reel 1, 1U	Charles Robert Housum, "The Gypsy Trail": scrapbook HM102	1917-1919
This material has been microfilmed. Patrons must use HM 102 instead of the originals.		
The original scrapbook appears to have been destroyed after it was microfilmed.		

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## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### Subjects

Actors -- Biography  
Theaters -- Connecticut -- New Haven  
Theater -- United States  
Theatrical paraphernalia -- United States

### Genres / Formats

Autographs  
Playbills

### Names

Barnum, P. T. (Phineas Taylor), 1810-1891  
Barrie, J. M. (James Matthew), 1860-1937  
Booth, Edwin, 1833-1893  
Crawford, Jack Randall, 1878-  
Galsworthy, John, 1867-1933  
Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), 1836-1911  
Hardy, Thomas, 1840-1928  
Harrison, Frederick, 1853 or 1854-1926  
Housum, Robert, 1886-1986  
James, Henry, 1843-1916  
Jefferson, Joseph, 1829-1905  
Jones, Henry Arthur, 1851-1929  
March, Fredric, 1897-1975  
Meredith, George, 1828-1909  
Montez, Lola, 1818-1861  
Murray, Gilbert, 1866-1957  
Rachel, 1821?-1858  
Ricordi, Giovanni, -1853  
Russell, Lillian, 1861-1922  
Silliman, Benjamin, 1816-1885  
Stoker, Bram, 1847-1912  
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 1811-1896  
Terry, Ellen, Dame, 1847-1928  
Verdi, Giuseppe, 1813-1901  
Whitty, May, Dame, 1865-1948  
Wilder, Thornton, 1897-1975