Guide to the Theater Manuscripts Collection

MS 667

compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

May 1980

Yale University Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8240
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
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: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0667

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 http://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. 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

Administrative Information

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

Conditions Governing Access
The materials are open for research.
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.

Preferred Citation

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

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.

Related Materials


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. Sothern 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; Guiseppe 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 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.

Arrangement

Arranged by type of material.
### Collection Contents

#### Inventory

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<th>Correspondence</th>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>b. 5</td>
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<td>Autographs</td>
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<td>Theater notebooks</td>
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<td>Play: “The Smuggler”</td>
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<td>Programs and printed memorabilia</td>
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<td>b. 12</td>
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<td>Charles Robert Housum, “The Gypsy Trail”: items removed from scrapbook</td>
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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
Theater -- United States
Theaters -- Connecticut -- New Haven
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