

University of Minnesota Theatre Collection

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October 2012
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Summary Information

Repository	James K. Hosmer Special Collections Library
Creator	University of Minnesota. Department of Theatre Arts.
Title	University of Minnesota Theatre Collection
Date	1883-2006
Extent	1.75 Linear feet
Language	English

History

The first group on the University of Minnesota campus to perform plays was Delta Sigma, organized in 1867. The group, typically avid debaters, would put on a play or musical once or twice every year. Theatre at the University continued like this for many years with no club or organization solely devoted to drama. Many other student groups also put on theatrical performances, like the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, who performed a play in 1892 during which the stage caught fire and performers and attendees were forced to leave. It is noted that in 1893 a dramatic club formed with 24 members, but there is little known about this club. In 1896 an official University Dramatic Club formed, and was considered the first real dramatic club on campus.

Theatre classes were offered at the University starting 1909, and most did not receive course credit. Only students taking a theatre class and in the dramatic club could get credit. In 1910 the Dramatic Club changed its name to "The Masquers." George Norton Northrup started an all-male dramatic club called "The Garrick Club" in 1912 and in 1914 they changed their name to the Agricultural Dramatic Club. In 1919 Miss Ariel McNaughton is officially appointed as the University's first full-time director of dramatics. By 1920, there were four dramatic groups on campus.

In 1922 The Arabs arrived as a producing group of engineers. They were also an all-male production company. Also in 1922, the new music auditorium, Scott Hall was opened and the drama clubs finally had a place to put on their performances. By 1924, seven different dramatic clubs existed at the University. In 1923 however, Ariel McNaughton resigned as Director of Dramatics. A series of short-term directories followed: Lester R. Raines succeeded McNaughton in 1924, followed by Otilie T. Seybolt in 1926, and Edward Staadt in 1928. Also in 1928, women were finally allowed into the Garrick Club.

By 1930 the University was back down to four theatre clubs. Edward Staadt died unexpectedly in 1931 and A. Dale Riley was appointed as director to fill in the vacant position, laying plans for a complete reorganization. Riley chose to control the entire Dramatic program and make the office of Director of Dramatics a real job. He combined the Masquers, Garrick Club, and National Collegiate Players to make the "University Theatre," taking production aspects from the student groups. Riley suffered a severe nervous breakdown in summer of 1936 and died a few months later. Albert J. Lovejoy came in to direct on the 1936-37 season, assisted by Kendrick Wilson and DeLisle Crawford. At the end of 1937 C. Lowell Lees took over as director.

In 1940, plans for a \$500,000 brand new theatre were drawn up; the building was to have three floors plus a basement which would house the classes and lectures. In 1943 Lees left for a different position at the University of Utah and the Director position was filled by University staff. The war made it difficult to find new staff until Frank Whiting became available in 1943. The war also put a hold on all new building plans, but as the war ended the plans were brought to the table again. By 1948 the Minnesota Children's Theatre was so popular throughout America, that the University started a separate program specifically for people interested in going into this path of work.

The 1950's were known as the "Golden Age of University Theatre" for the University. The Theatre debuted many plays on the campus stage and saw the return of many old favorites. The push for the new

building took front seat in 1953 with the publishing of the book, *A Circle of Vision*, which talked about the vision of the theatre program at the University. The cost of the new building had risen to \$722,000. In 1959 Elmer Edgar Stoll, a strong supporter of the Theatre and University retiree (1942), died and left a huge amount of his estate to the University to build a new theatre building.

In 1960, Tyrone Guthrie decided to build his new theatre in Minneapolis which caused the budget for the University Theatre to skyrocket. When the Guthrie Theatre opened in 1963, the University partnered with them and sent 12 students per year to the Guthrie Theatre for internships. By 1967 the new building looked more like it would become a reality, as the Theatre program was spread across ten different buildings at this point.

There was unrest on the campus at the start of the 1970s with many protests taking place for reasons stretching from the Vietnam War to fast food chains. In January 1971, ground was finally broken for the new building, which would house four theatres, classrooms, scene and costume shops, offices, and television and radio studios. In 1973, the final season was held in Scott Hall and the Rarig Center opened in time for the 1973-1974 seasons.

In the early 1980s, the relationship between the Guthrie and the University were revitalized, the Guthrie offered internships to fifty percent of graduating students in the arts program and the Guthrie actors often held workshops with the students, acting as their mentors. In 1985, after 44 years, the Young People's University Theatre performances were put to an end.

In the summer of 1994, the Showboat performances moved into the main stage while the boat was under renovation. In 1995, the Experiential Theatre was renamed the Charles M. Nolte Xperimental Theatre and was handed over to the students to run. There was no Showboat production for the first time in 39 years in 1997. Instead, the University started a collaboration with Penumbra Summer Theatre by housing its summer workshops at the University. Funding for the renovation of the Showboat still continued however. In 1999, the new dance center, the Barbara Barker Center for Dance, opened and was debuted with brand new dance numbers commissioned for the occasion.

The newly renovated Showboat was scheduled to open in time for summer of 2000, but as it neared completion it burned down and they were left with nothing. Some good news though, at the start of 2000, the Rarig Center underwent some renovations, including changing the soundboards from tape decks to digital and getting new seats in all the theatres. In 2002 a brand new showboat was purchased and moved to its permanent home on Harriet Island. Alumni actors returned for the opening production.

The University Theatre continues to educate students and audiences about the performing arts, and about the social issues and human emotions the arts speak to so powerfully. They realize this mission by creating, producing and studying works of theatre and dance, and performing them publicly for diverse audiences drawn from both the University and the community at large.

This history was derived from the *about* page of the University of Minnesota Department of Theatre Arts and Dance. <https://theatre.umn.edu/about/history>

Description of Collection

The University of Minnesota Theatre Collection consists of four boxes. The first box includes folders of newsletters, season brochures, advertisements, clippings, and miscellaneous records. The second box also contains newspaper clippings and miscellaneous materials, as well as press releases and a list of produced plays. Boxes 3 and 4 including performance programs from the University Theater and Centennial Showboat.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

James K. Hosmer Special Collections Library October 2012

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- University of Minnesota. Department of Theatre Arts.

Subject(s)

- College theater -- Minnesota.
- Showboats.
- Theater -- Minnesota -- Minneapolis -- History.
- University of Minnesota.

Promotional Materials

Collection Inventory

Promotional Materials		
	Box	Folder
Season Brochures 1935-1955	1	1
Season Brochures 1955-1970	1	2
Season Brochures 1970-1985, 1995-1996	1	3
Advertisements 1940-1995	1	4
	Box	Folder
Tickets, playlists, etc. 1880-1955	1	5
Clippings		
	Box	Folder
Clippings 1961-1976	1	6
Clippings 1940s	2	1
Clippings 1952-1968	2	2

Press Releases

Clippings 1969-1992	2	3
Clippings 1974-1982	2	4
Clippings 1983-1994	2	5
Clippings: Showboat 1962-1973	2	6
Press Releases		
	Box	Folder
Press Releases 1972-1973	2	7
Press Releases 1974-1975	2	8
Press Releases 1976	2	9
Press Releases 1977	2	10
Press Releases 1978	2	11
Press Releases 1979	2	12
Press Releases 1980	2	13
Miscellaneous		
	Box	Folder

Programs

Miscellaneous 1960-1980	2	14
List of Produced Plays 1884-1954	2	15
Programs		
	Box	Folder
Programs Undated	3	1
Programs 1894-1929	3	2
Programs 1930-1939	3	3
Programs 1940-1945	3	4
Programs 1946-1949	3	5
Programs 1950-1952	3	6
Programs 1953-1956	3	7
Programs 1956-1958	3	8
Programs 1958-1960	3	9
Programs 1960-1962	3	10

Programs

Programs 1962-1964	4	1
Programs 1965-1967	4	2
Programs 1968-1970	4	3
Programs 1971-1973	4	4
Programs 1974-1976	4	5
Programs 1978-1982	4	6
Programs 1983-1987	4	7
Programs 1987-1989	4	8
Programs 1989-1991	4	9
Programs 1991-2006	4	10