

ArMs1977.041  
4 boxes (2 document boxes and 2 oversized flat boxes)  
3.5 cubic feet  
4C – 5.4.B (OS), 5.4.C (DB)

Guide to the Theatre Collection

1733-1939

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## Abstract

The Theatre Collection consists of playscripts, playbills, programs, and other ephemera from various theatre venues in Brooklyn and Manhattan, dating from the early eighteenth century to the 1930s. In addition to playbills, there are some programs relating to concerts, musical comedies, and musical revues, as well as ephemera.

## Provenance

The Theatre Collection was donated to the Brooklyn Historical Society from various donors, but provenance could not be established for all items.

## Historical Note

Brooklyn has had a lively history as an entertainment outlet, particularly through its active theatre scene during the gas-light days of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Audiences were enthralled by the performances of such as the great stage actress Maude Adams, the first actress to portray Peter Pan<sup>1</sup>, in *The Pretty Sister of Jose* and Sir Henry Irving, the first noted English actor to have been granted knighthood in 1895<sup>2</sup>, in *The Amber Heart*. These materials document the dynamic venues that working-class and middle class Brooklynites alike attended on a weekly basis, from the Manhattan Beach Amusement Park in Coney Island for musical comedies to the infamous Conway's Brooklyn Theater, which in December 5, 1876 went down in flames due to the dangers posed by overcrowding, combustible materials, raucous audiences and inadequate escape exits.<sup>3</sup> This event later spurred local legislation to regulate theater design, incorporating them into city building codes in 1885.<sup>4</sup>

These programs and playbills provide information about a variety of theater productions, including names of performers, productions, the different acts that comprised an evening's entertainment, and advertisements. Many of these playbills and programs were kept by patrons as theater souvenirs and cover a variety of genres, including early musicals, traditional vaudeville shows, comedies, revues, and English dramas.

For more information on the cultural history and evolution of theatre programs and playbills in the United States, see the Library of Congress's *American Memory- Variety Stage: Theater Playbills and Programs* online exhibit at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/vshtml/vsprge.html>

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<sup>1</sup> For more biographical information, see the biographical note in the *Inventory of the Maude Adams Collection*, \*T-Mss 1956-001, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>2</sup> The Irving Society, <http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/> Retrieved on February 28, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *1876 Brooklyn Theatre Fire*, Brooklyn Genealogy, <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Newspaper/BSU/1876.Bklyn.Theatre.Fire.html> Retrieved on February 28, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed history on this event, see the historical note in *The Brooklyn Theatre Fire Relief Collection*, ArMs1977.049, Brooklyn Historical Society.

## Scope and Content

The Theatre Collection is comprised of playscripts, playbills, programs, and other ephemera from various theatre venues in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Although some material dates from the early eighteenth century to as late as the 1930s, most of the material focuses on the years 1823-1911. Programs relating to concerts, musical comedies, and musical revues are also included. In addition, the collection has some early rare examples of handwritten director's promptbooks dating to 1733. Some examples of ephemeral material contained in the collection are an invitation to a ball sponsored by the Academy of Brooklyn to the Prince of Wales, Brooklyn Academy ticket statements, and clippings. The majority of the collection centers on Brooklyn and Manhattan theatre venues. Such well-known establishments as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Montauk Theatre, Orpheum Theatre, Payton's Lee Avenue Theatre, and the Lyceum Hall in Brooklyn and the Astor Place Opera House, Barnum's American Museum, Franklin Theatre, and Laura Keen's Theatre are included in this collection.

For an index of individual performers and plays listed, see the Box 1, Folder 1: Playbills and Programs Finding Aid (ca.1960s). Two Official Football Score Cards from the Crescent Football Club were removed and placed in the Brooklyn Ephemera Collection under Series 8: Sports.

### Series Descriptions

Series I: Playscripts and Printed Plays, 1733-1896; undated

They are organized alphabetically by production location.

This series comprises 22 play titles, some incomplete, covering comedies, farces, and dramas scripts. Included are some handwritten directors' and prompters' scripts, actors' sides (sheets, usually a half page, containing lines and cues for a single role), varying versions of entire scripts or single acts, and printed plays. They are written in English.

Series II: Playbills, Programs, and Ephemera, 1796-1939; undated

Organized alphabetically by venue.

This series includes playbills and programs from a number of Brooklyn and Manhattan theatres, that seem to have been amassed by patrons as theater souvenirs. These programs and playbills provide information about a variety of theater productions, including names of performers, productions, the different acts that comprised an evening's entertainment, and advertisements.

Sub-series 1 – Playbills, 1796-1939; undated

Sub-series 2 – Programs, 1846-1937; undated

Sub-series 3 – Ephemera, 1853-1860; undated

## System of Arrangement

The collection is organized alphabetically into the following two series and three sub-series:

Series I: Playscripts and Printed Plays, 1733-1896; undated

- Series II: Playbills, Programs and Ephemera, 1796-1939; undated  
Sub-series 1 – Playbills, 1796-1939; undated  
Sub-series 2 – Programs, 1846-1937; undated  
Sub-series 3 – Ephemera, 1853-1860; undated

Series II in boxes 3 and 4 contain oversized materials and are noted as (OVSZ) in the container list.

### **Conditions of Access and Use**

Brooklyn Historical Society archives and manuscripts must be examined on site. Some materials in the collection are very brittle and fragile to touch. They must be handled with utmost care. Appointments to examine archives and manuscript materials must be made in advance. Please contact the Brooklyn Historical Society to learn of any additional conditions of access and use. For permission to publish, contact the Archivist.

### **Preferred Citation**

Guide to the Theatre Collection, ArMs 1977.041, Brooklyn Historical Society.

### **Language of Materials**

All materials are in English.

### **Related Materials**

- The Jenks Theatre Program Collection, ArMs1992.023, Brooklyn Historical Society.
- The Brooklyn Theatre Fire Relief Collection, ArMs1977.049, Brooklyn Historical Society.
- Alice G. Fell Theatre Programs, ArMs1977.208, Brooklyn Historical Society.

### **Access Points**

Document Types:

Clippings  
Invitations  
Plays --19<sup>th</sup> century  
Playbills --19<sup>th</sup> century  
Programs--19<sup>th</sup> century  
Prompt books --18<sup>th</sup> century  
Scripts--19<sup>th</sup> century

Subject Topics:

Drama--New York (State) --New York

Playbills  
 Theaters --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Theaters --New York (State) --New York  
 Theater programs

Subject Places:

Brooklyn (New York, NY) --Social life and customs--19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Manhattan (New York, NY) --Social life and customs--19<sup>th</sup> century

Subject Organizations:

Brooklyn Academy of Music --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Conway's Brooklyn Theatre --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Grand Opera House --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Manhattan Beach Amusement Park--New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Montauk Theatre--New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 New Brighton Theatre--New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Colonel Sinn's New Park Theatre --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Orpheum Theatre--New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Payton's Theatre --New York (State) --Brooklyn  
 Teller's Broadway Theatre-- New York (State) --Brooklyn

Other Names:

Adams, Maude, 1872-1953  
 Irving, Henry, Sir, 1838-1905

**Container List**

**Series I: Playscripts and Printed Plays, 1733-1896; undated**

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Description</u>  | <u>Dates</u>  |
|------------|---------------|---|---------------|
| 1          | 1             | Playbills and Programs Finding Aid  | ca.1960s      |
| 1          | 2-4           | Playscripts, Burton's Theatre, NY   | 1823, undated |
| 1          | 5             | Playscript, Park Theatre, Brooklyn, NY  | 1896          |
| 1          | 6             | Printed Plays, <i>Three Odes: The Royal Hero; The Royal Nuptials; Religion and Liberty Triumphant</i> | 1733          |

**Series II: Playbills, Programs, and Ephemera, 1796-1939; undated**

*Sub-series I – Playbills, 1796-1939; undated*

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Description</u>                             | <u>Dates</u>       |
|------------|---------------|--|--------------------|
| 1          | 6-10          | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY                 | 1864-1916          |
| 4          | 1             | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)          | 1855-1864; undated |
| 4          | 2             | American Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)          | 1835-1836          |
| 1          | 11            | Amphian Theatre, Brooklyn, NY                  | 1901               |
| 4          | 3             | Astor Place Opera House, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1848-1852          |
| 4          | 4             | Barnum's American Museum, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1855               |
| 4          | 8             | Bowery Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)            | 1843-1853          |
| 4          | 5-6           | Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ) | 1861-1866          |
| 4          | 7             | Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)           | 1845-1853          |
| 1          | 12            | Broadway Theatre, New York, NY                 | 1900               |
| 4          | 9             | Broadway Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)          | 1848-1858          |
| 4          | 10            | Burton's Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)          | 1848-1858          |

|   |       |   |                    |
|---|-------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 13    | Casino Theatre, New York, NY  | 1901               |
| 4 | 11    | Castle Garden, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1845-1853          |
| 4 | 12    | Chatham Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1841-1845          |
| 1 | 14    | Columbia Theatre, Brooklyn, NY  | 1896-1900          |
| 1 | 15    | Daly's Theatre, New York, NY  | 1896               |
| 4 | 13    | Franklin Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1835               |
| 4 | 14    | Franklin Theatre, New York, NY- Scrapbook (OVSZ)  | 1835-1836          |
| 1 | 16    | Grand Opera House, Brooklyn, NY   | 1909               |
| 4 | 15    | Great Metropolitan Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1854               |
| 1 | 17    | Harris Theatre, New York, NY  | 1911               |
| 1 | 18    | Hudson Theatre, New York, NY  | 1911               |
| 4 | 16    | La Farge's Metropolitan, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1855               |
| 4 | 17    | Laura Keene's Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1856-1859          |
| 4 | 18    | Lyceum Hall, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)  | 1847               |
| 4 | 19-20 | Metropolitan Hall, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1852-1853; undated |
| 1 | 19-20 | Metropolitan Opera House, New York, NY  | 1855-1939          |
| 1 | 21    | Metropolitan Theatre, New York, NY  | undated            |
| 4 | 21    | Metropolitan Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1855               |
| 4 | 22-23 | Mitchell's Olympic Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1845-1849          |
| 2 | 1     | Montauk Theater, Brooklyn, NY   | 1897-1904          |
| 4 | 24    | National Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1837-1853          |
| 2 | 2     | New Union Square Theatre, New York, NY  | 1900               |
| 4 | 25    | New York Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1796-1811          |
| 4 | 26    | Niblo's, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1845-1864          |
| 4 | 27    | Niblo's Concert Saloon, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1853               |
| 4 | 28    | Niblo's Garden, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1853-1864          |
| 4 | 29    | Niblo's Saloon, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1852-1860          |
| 4 | 30    | Palmo's Opera House, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1847               |
| 2 | 3     | Park Theatre, Brooklyn, NY  | 1896               |
| 4 | 31-32 | Park Theatre, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)   | 1863-1892          |
| 2 | 4-5   | Payton's Theatre, Brooklyn, NY  | 1901-1904          |
| 2 | 6     | Shakespeare Association, Brooklyn, NY   | 1846               |
| 2 | 7     | Sam S. Shubert Theatre, New York, NY  | 1911               |
| 2 | 8     | Teller's Broadway Theatre, Brooklyn, NY   | 1905-1911          |
| 2 | 9     | Thirty-Ninth Street Theatre, New York, NY   | 1911               |
| 4 | 33    | Tripler Hall, New York, NY (OVSZ)   | 1851-1856          |
| 4 | 34    | Various assorted playbills, Brooklyn and New York, NY (OVSZ)<br>-see appendix below for listing of individual venues. | 1811-1893          |
| 4 | 35    | Wallack's Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1853-1864          |
| 4 | 36    | Winter Garden Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)  | 1859-1864          |

*Sub-series 2 – Programs, 1848-1937; undated*

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Description</u>                            | <u>Dates</u> |
|------------|---------------|---|--------------|
| 2          | 10-11         | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY                | 1887-1897    |
| 3          | 1-2           | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)         | 1858-1937    |
| 3          | 3             | Brighton Beach Hall, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)      | 1888         |
| 2          | 12            | Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY       | 1863         |
| 3          | 4             | The Brooklyn Daily, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)       | 1876-1878    |
| 3          | 5             | Brooklyn Programme, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)       | 1864-1871    |
| 3          | 6             | Columbia Theatre, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)         | 1892-1893    |
| 2          | 13            | Conway's Brooklyn Theatre, Brooklyn, NY       | 1875         |
| 3          | 7             | The Daily Programme, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)      | 1866-1893    |
| 3          | 8             | Daly's Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)           | 1899-1900    |
| 2          | 14            | Grand Theatre, Brooklyn, NY                   | 1887         |
| 3          | 9             | Grand Opera House, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)        | 1893         |
| 3          | 10            | Long Beach Concert Programme, L.I., NY (OVSZ) | 1885         |

|   |    |  |                    |
|---|----|--|--------------------|
| 2 | 15 | Lyceum Theatre, Brooklyn, NY                       | 1891-1893          |
| 2 | 16 | Manhattan Beach Amusement Park, Brooklyn, NY       | 1886-1901          |
| 2 | 17 | Metropolitan Theatre, New York, NY                 | 1848-1855, undated |
| 2 | 18 | New Brighton Theatre, Brooklyn, NY                 | 1912               |
| 3 | 11 | Col. Sinn's New Park Theatre, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ)  | 1892               |
| 2 | 19 | Orpheum Theatre, Brooklyn, NY                      | 1901               |
| 3 | 12 | Prospect Park Concert Program, Brooklyn, NY (OVSZ) | 1883               |
| 3 | 13 | Regent Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)                | 1886               |
| 3 | 14 | Thalia Theatre, New York, NY (OVSZ)                | 1888               |

*Sub-series 3 – Ephemera, 1853-1860; undated*

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Description</u>   | <u>Dates</u> |
|------------|---------------|--|--------------|
| 2          | 20            | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY – Ticket statement  | 1853         |
| 2          | 21            | Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY – Invitation to<br>The Prince of Wales Ball to W.B. Parsons | 1860         |
| 2          | 22            | Payton's Theatre, Brooklyn, NY – Sheet Music   | undated      |
| 2          | 23            | Unidentified – handwritten page from a promptbook  | undated      |
| 2          | 24            | Winter Garden Theatre, New York, NY – Clipping   | 1860         |

## Appendix

Some venues that are included in Box 4, Folder 34 include:

Anatomical Museum, undated  
Apollo Rooms, 1848  
Broadway Boudoir, 1860  
Broadway Tabernacle, 1846  
Broadway Varieties, undated  
Brougham's Lyceum, 1851-1852  
Buckley's Opera House, undated  
Deutsches National Theater in Olympic, 1851  
Empire Hall, undated  
Entr'acte, 1856  
Hope Chapel, 1851  
Irving Hall, 1862  
Mechanics Hall, undated  
Minstrel Hall, undated  
New York Amphitheatre, undated  
Norombega Hall, Bangor, undated  
Panorama of Niagara, undated  
Proctor's Criterion Theatre, undated  
St. Charles Theatre, undated  
Stoppani's Panorama Hall, undated  
Stuyvesant Institute, 1849  
Union Theatre, 1864