



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Barbara Dilley papers

1958-2002 [bulk 1968-1984]

(S) *MGZMD 327

Compiled by Jennifer A. Ferretti, Pratt Institute, 2014, 2013

Summary

Creator: Dilley, Barbara

Title: Barbara Dilley papers

Date: 1958-2002 [bulk 1968-1984]

Size: 1.51 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Unknown

Abstract: Barbara Dilley is an American dancer, choreographer, and educator. The Barbara Dilley collection (1958-2002) contains correspondence, photographs, reviews, programs, flyers and posters, postcards, art/dance publications, rehearsal notes, and clippings pertaining to Barbara Dilley's career as a dancer and choreographer.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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Processing note: Compiled by Jennifer A. Ferretti, Pratt Institute, 2014, 2013 Original order was maintained.

Creator History

Barbara Dilley was born in Chicago, Illinois near the end of the Depression. She began dancing at age five and by 10 she was studying with Audrée Estey, founder of the Princeton Ballet Academy and the

American Repertory Ballet. After graduating from high school, Dilley took classes at Jacob's Pillow, the renowned dance festival in Becket, Massachusetts.

In 1956 she enrolled at Mt. Holyoke College where her teacher Helen Priest Rogers helped her design a special interdisciplinary major (dance and history) in American Studies. Dilley finished her college dance career by choreographing *Melora*, the first original creative work at Mt. Holyoke to receive academic credit.

Dilley began dancing professionally in 1960 at the Connecticut College School of Dance annual workshop, where she worked with choreographer Merce Cunningham. Dilley was asked to join the Cunningham company in 1962 but postponed the offer until 1963 due to pregnancy. After five years as a Cunningham company dancer, Dilley joined the Judson Dance Theater, an informal dance group of experimentalists who helped develop postmodern dance.

In 1968 Dilley performed in Yvonne Rainer's *North East Passing* and Rainer's 1969 production of *Continuous Project – Altered Daily*. The cast was billed as the Rainer Dance Group and contained the original members of what would become *The Grand Union* (named after the supermarket chain), an improvisational dance group. While in *The Grand Union*, Dilley continued performing her own work in dance performances such as *The Sapsuckersummer Dance* series at Cornell Summer Dance Group (1970), *Wonder Dances*, performed in Minneapolis, Chicago, and Cambridge (1975), and *To the Golden Gate Bridge*, a performance piece from her dance series *Coast* (1968-1971).

In 1974 Dilley founded *Danspace Project* with Larry Fagin and Mary Overlie and secured the stewardship of landmarked St. Mark's Church In-The-Bowery. That same year, Dilley founded the all-female dance company *The Natural History of the American Dance*. After seeing a performance, dancer Tom Hast asked Dilley to teach for two weeks at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. After teaching in Naropa's first summer session, she was asked to design a year-round dance program at the institute.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Dilley traveled throughout the U.S. and Europe, teaching and performing. In 1980 she founded the *Crystal Dance Company*, which performed in Boulder until 1983. Dilley became president of Naropa Institute in 1985, where she remained until 1993. In 1994 she returned to the Interdisciplinary Studies department as professor in the Dance/Movement Studies track.

In 1995, Dilley joined Diane Butler, Carol McDowell, and Polly Motley in founding *Mariposa Collective* and the *Naked Face Project*. Since 1999, Dilley has focused on the *Fearless Dancing Project*, which she performed in November 2000 with dancers Cara Reeser, Wendell Beavers, Steve Fetherhuff, and Steve Clorfeine at the Judson Memorial Church. Dilley also participated in many side projects, such as the *Sonic Arts Union* (a collective of experimental musicians), an installation of dance and video known as *Video Quartet*, served as artistic advisor to *Central Notion Company*, and worked with the New York City venue *Eden's Expressway*.

In 2008-2009, Dilley directed the *deSoLAte/deLigHT* project. Dilley is currently a professor with the School of the Arts Contemporary Performance department at Naropa University.

Scope and Content Note

The Barbara Dilley collection (1958-2002) is arranged chronologically, with file titles being geographic location, subject, title of work, time period, or dance company. Files can contain correspondence, photographs, reviews, programs, flyers and posters, postcards, art/dance publications, rehearsal notes,

and clippings and relate to Dilley's career as a dancer and choreographer.

Photographs are of Barbara Dilley and her classes, rehearsal and production stills, and casual portraits. The bulk of the correspondence is professional. Reviews and clippings document Dilley's own career as well as the careers of her teachers and fellow dancers. There are flyers and posters for auditions and performances as well as rehearsal notes. Programs are of productions performed, choreographed or created by Dilley or other dancers. These materials can be found throughout the collection. There are also two full issues of the arts magazine *Avalanche*.

Dance groups and artists represented include Judson Dance Theater, Danspace Project, Merce Cunningham, Batya Zamir, Trisha Brown, Phill Niblock, Carolyn Brown, and Steven Paxton.

Arrangement: The Barbara Dilley collection is currently arranged chronologically. Folders may contain a large range of dates. Folder titles include geographic location, subject, time period, and dance company. Folder titles are Dilley's own. Original order was maintained.

Key Terms

Occupations

Choreographers
Dance teachers
Dancers

Subjects

Choreography and dance
Dance -- United States
Improvisation in dance
Performance art
Postmodern dance

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings
Fliers
Photographs
Postcards
Programs
Reviews

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 New Jersey 1952-1977
- b. 1 f. 2 Colorado 1958-1984
- b. 1 f. 3 Mt. Holyoke 1959
- b. 4 f. 1 Mt. Holyoke 1959
- b. 1 f. 4 Rainer, Yvonne 1966-1970
- b. 1 f. 5-6 New York 1966-1981
- b. 1 f. 7 Merce Cunningham Dance Company 1968-1992
- b. 1 f. 8 *Coast* 1969-1971
- b. 1 f. 9 The Natural History of the American Dance Company 1970-1975
- b. 4 f. 4 The Natural History of the American Dance Company 1970-1975
- b. 1 f. 10 Sonic Arts Union 1970
- b. 1 f. 11 *Sapsuckersummer* 1970
- b. 1 f. 12 *Video Quartet*
- b. 1 f. 13 *Sets*
- b. 2 f. 1-2 1970s 1970-1980
- b. 4 f. 2 1970s 1970-1980
- b. 2 f. 3 Teaching in Europe
- b. 2 f. 4 Lloyd, Barbara 1971
- b. 2 f. 5-7 The Grand Union 1971-1978
- b. 4 f. 3 The Grand Union 1971-1978
- b. 2 f. 8 Louisiana with Tina Gerard 1972-1973
- b. 2 f. 9 Central Notion Company 1973
- b. 2 f. 10 *Avalanche* 1973-1975
- b. 4 f. 5 *Avalanche* 1973-1975
- b. 2 f. 11 *Wonder Dances* 1975
- b. 2 f. 12 Articles 1976-2002
- b. 3 f. 1 Teaching 1980
- b. 3 f. 2 Eden's Expressway 1980-1981
- b. 3 f. 3 Crystal Dance Company 1980-1983
- b. 3 f. 4 1980s 1980-1990
- b. 3 f. 5-6 Original Work 1994-2000
- b. 3 f. 7 Mariposa Collective 1995
- b. 3 f. 8-9 *Naked Face Project* 1995-1996