



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Helen Priest Rogers dance files

1940-1984

(S) *MGZMD 389

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

Summary

Creator: Rogers, Helen Priest

Title: Helen Priest Rogers dance files

Date: 1940-1984

Size: .42 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Donated by Senta Driver, 2002 and Ilene Fox, 2011.

Abstract: Helen Priest Rogers was an authority on dance notation, a co-founder of the Dance Notation Bureau and a pioneer in the use of film to preserve choreography. The Helen Priest Rogers dance files consist of photographs; correspondence; and programs about dancers, dance companies, and preservation research

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>

Conditions Governing Use: The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Dance Division at dance@nypl.org.

Preferred citation: Helen Priest Rogers dance files, (S) *MGZMD 389. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

Creator History

Helen Priest Rogers was an authority on dance notation, a co-founder of the Dance Notation Bureau and a pioneer in the use of film to preserve choreography. She was born in Ogdensburg, New York and attended St. Lawrence University and Columbia University. She went on to study modern dance with Martha Graham and performed with the Graham Company in 1935. At Graham's suggestion, Rogers

travelled to Germany in 1936 to learn the new dance notation system of Labanotation. In 1940 she founded the Dance Notation Bureau in New York along with Eve Gentry, Janey Price and Ann Hutchinson. The Dance Notation Bureau continues to be an important center for notation research.

Rogers made her first dance films at the Bennington Dance Festivals of the 1930s. From 1948 to 1976 she supervised the filming of 75 productions, including works by Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor.

She taught dance and notation at various colleges and directed the dance program at Mount Holyoke College from 1953 to 1975. Rogers retired to Brattleboro, Vermont where she lived until her death in 1999.

Custodial History

The collection was bequeathed to the Dance Notation Bureau by Helen Priest Rogers.

Scope and Content Note

The Helen Priest Rogers dance files consist of photographs; correspondence; and programs about dancers, dance companies, and preservation research. The Connecticut College School of the Dance file holds photographs depicting campus life, master classes taught by artists such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, and students at work. The photographs were taken by Roger's husband, Hubert. There are also photographs within the subject files on Martha Graham and Dance Players.

Files on Martha Graham, Dance International, and the Dance Players Company hold flyers, photographs, and programs. There is also a course outline on modern dance for beginners by Martha Hill. There is a small amount of correspondence from José Limón, including one 1957 letter asking Rogers for the video of *The Exiles*, as he's forgotten portions of the dance. Elizabeth Sherbon's file holds a photocopy of a letter from Elizabeth Sherbon to a relation in 1984. The letter gives a detailed outline of her early training as a dancer with her twin sister Alice Sherbon Bauman. The letter mentions Roger as an expert on Labanotation.

Dance preservation files hold two letters to Muriel Topaz from the Mellon Foundation regarding a study on preservation, and a list of participants for a 1989 dance preservation meeting.

A file on Bennington School of the Dance holds programs and material from student Susan Ann Morse including notes she took on dance classes and theory. Morse was a student at Bennington in July, 1937.

Key Terms

Subjects

Dance -- History
Dance -- Study and teaching
Dance companies