



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Edith Segal Papers**

1920-1997

(S) \*MGZMD 122

Processed by Susan Kraft.

## Summary

**Creator:** Segal, Edith, 1902-

**Title:** Edith Segal Papers

**Date:** 1920-1997

**Source:** Received from the estate of Edith Segal, April 1998.

**Abstract:** The papers contain a wide variety of materials of potential interest to a scholar of Edith Segal's lifelong dance career or of leftist political activism in dance.

**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>

**Preferred citation:** Edith Segal papers, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

**Language of the Material:** In English with some print material in Hebrew and/or Yiddish

**Processing note:** Processed by Susan Kraft; machine-readable finding aid created by Susan Kraft.

## Creator History

Edith Segal was an American dancer, teacher and writer. Born in 1902 on the lower east side of New York City, her father was a cigar maker and an active union member. Her mother ran a small business out of the house as a hairdresser and maker of wigs for observant Jewish women.

Her first recollection of dancing was in the streets to the music of organ grinders. Her formal training began at the Henry Street Settlement where she studied music and dance. At age 14 she auditioned to be a scholarship student at the Neighborhood Playhouse on Grand Street where she also performed in numerous productions. There, for the next twelve years, she immersed herself in all the theater arts including music, singing, costume and stagecraft as well as dance.

Her work in dance was always closely allied to her political activism. In the 1920s and 30s, she directed the Nature Friends Dance Group, the Red Dancers and the Dance Group of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union. She was also the Social Director at Unity House, the vacation resort of the ILGWU. For much of the 1930s through the 1970s Segal taught at Camp Kinderland.

In the 1950s Segal gave her support to many friends who were persecuted for their political beliefs during this period of anti-communist sentiment. She herself was asked to appear before a New York Commission holding hearing on communist influence in summer camps. During this time she also began to publish her poetry. Eventually she published more than ten books of poetry, three of them for children. Throughout her career, she also wrote and lectured on dance.

Segal remained active in the arts and political communities up until her death in 1997.

## Scope and Content Note

The Edith Segal Papers document her professional life as a dancer, choreographer, writer and political activist. The collection contains a wide variety of materials of potential interest to a scholar of Segal's lifelong dance career or of leftist political activism in dance.

The papers are organized into six series. Series I, A and B will be of interest to those looking for the raw material of her creative work. Subseries C contains both in process and completed lectures and essays including some 15 pages of personal memories and self-described highlights of her life.

Series II contains a variety of dance related correspondence, some of a business nature as well as personal tributes from people whose lives were touched by Segal's artistry and commitment. Series III contains programs, announcements and press material that give a chronological sense of her work as well as two subject focused folders, one on the Neighborhood Playhouse and one on the National Dance Congress of 1936.

The reviews and articles in Series IV also include a lengthy interview with Paul Sporn for a project on the federal patronage of the arts in Michigan during the depression. There is a folder of letters and corrections relating to this interview in the correspondence series.

Series V contains programs and pamphlets Edith Segal collected.

Series VI contains one scrapbook documenting the summer of 1924 at Unity House, the summer resort of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU).

Separated from the collection were books and dance manuals added to the book holdings of the Dance Collection. They are described in the separation list.

**Arrangement:** Organized in six series: I. Writing and lectures; II. Correspondence; III. Programs, Announcements, Press releases; IV. Reviews and Articles about Segal; V. Programs and Pamphlets (not Edith Segal productions); VI. Scrapbook.

## Key Terms

**Subjects**

Dance -- Political aspects -- New York (State) -- New York  
Dance for children  
Jewish dance  
Manuscripts -- Collections

**Occupations**

Dancers

**Titles**

Gift of Edith Segal estate

**Names**

Segal, Edith, 1902-  
Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre  
Unity House

## Container List

### I. Writing and lectures

#### Notes for books.

- b. *Dance and song book*
- b. 1 f. 1 book manuscript draft 1
- b. 1 f. 2 book manuscript draft 2
- b. 1 f. 3 A birdie flies
- b. 1 f. 4 A little boy, a little girl
- b. 1 f. 5 Alphabet peace dance
- b. 1 f. 6 Broiges tants
- b. 1 f. 7 Chanukah candles
- b. 1 f. 8 Chanukah o Chanukah
- b. 1 f. 9 Children, children, pretty as can be
- b. 1 f. 10 Garland Dance
- b. 1 f. 11 Happy and carefree
- b. 1 f. 12 Happy children
- b. 1 f. 13 Hi, good morning
- b. 1 f. 14 Holidays
- b. 1 f. 15 How do you do?
- b. 1 f. 16 Hup my humentashn
- b. 1 f. 17 I can help
- b. 1 f. 18 I have an old overcoat
- b. 1 f. 19 Let us greet
- b. 1 f. 20 The little bee
- b. 1 f. 21 Merry, merry, let us be
- b. 1 f. 22 My daddy
- b. 1 f. 23 My name is
- b. 1 f. 24 One, two
- b. 1 f. 25 Patch tants
- b. 1 f. 26 Potatoes
- b. 1 f. 27 There is a girl (boy)
- b. 1 f. 28 Toom Balaika
- b. 1 f. 29 We are seven
- b. 1 f. 30 What is today
- b. 1 f. 31 When I get up
- b. 1 f. 32 unused material
- Folk dancing made simple*
- b. 1 f. 33 Folk dancing made simple manuscript
- b. 1 f. 34 Folk dancing made simple illustrations

#### Other dance and music notes.

I. Writing and lectures (cont.)

Other dance and music notes. (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 35 1920s
- b. 2 f. 36 1930s
- b. 2 f. 36a Survey regarding teaching 1930s

Writing, notes and lectures.

- b. 2 f. 37 1930s
- b. 2 f. 38 1940s
- b. 2 f. 39 1950s
- b. 2 f. 40 1960s
- b. 2 f. 41 1970s
- b. 2 f. 42 1980s
- b. 2 f. 43 1990s
- b. 2 f. 44 undated

II. Correspondence (dance related).

- b. 3 f. 45 1920s
- b. 3 f. 46 1930s
- b. 3 f. 47 1940s
- b. 3 f. 48 1950s
- b. 3 f. 49 1960s
- b. 3 f. 50 1970s
- b. 3 f. 51 1980s
- b. 3 f. 52 1990s
- b. 3 f. 53 undated

III. Programs, Announcements, Press releases

- b. 4 f. 54 1920s
- b. 4 f. 55-56 1930s
- b. 4 f. 57 1940s
- b. 4 f. 58 1950s
- b. 4 f. 59 1960s
- b. 4 f. 60 1970s
- b. 4 f. 61 1980s
- b. 4 f. 62 1990s
- b. 4 f. 63 undated
- b. 4 f. 64 Neighborhood Playhouse
- b. 4 f. 65 National Dance Congress

IV. Reviews and articles about Segal

- b. 5 f. 66 1920s
- b. 5 f. 67 1930s
- b. 5 f. 68 1940s
- b. 5 f. 69 1950s
- b. 5 f. 70 1960s
- b. 5 f. 71 1970s

IV. Reviews and articles about Segal (cont.)

b. 5 f. 72 1980s and 1990s

b. 5 f. 73 undated

V. Programs and pamphlets (not Segal productions)

b. 5 f. 74 Cuba

b. 5 f. 75 Soviet Union

b. 5 f. 76 United States

b. 6 VI. Unity House scrapbook

Photographs and notes documenting the summer of 1924 at Unity House, the summer resort of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)