



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Jane Dransfield papers**

1892-1957 [bulk 1908-1956]

\*T-Mss 2012-032

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013

## Summary

**Creator:** Dransfield, Jane, 1875-1957

**Title:** Jane Dransfield papers

**Date:** 1892-1957 [bulk 1908-1956]

**Size:** 7.63 linear feet (19 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Catherine Dransfield Stone, date unknown.

**Abstract:** Jane Dransfield (1875-1957) was a playwright, poet, and lecturer on theater. The Jane Dransfield papers (1892-1957) document the creation, publication, production, and reception of her work, especially her plays. The papers also document her work as a lecturer, her study of drama, and her professional relationships. The collection holds correspondence, clippings, programs, promotional materials, scripts, poetry, articles, drafts, and notes.

**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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**Preferred citation:** Jane Dransfield papers, \*T-Mss 2012-032. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013 Most materials were placed in new folders. Original order was maintained. Scrapbooks containing only loose materials or materials attached with paperclips were disassembled, and the materials were placed in folders.

## Creator History

Jane Dransfield (1875-1957) was a playwright, poet, and lecturer on theater. She was born in

Rochester, New York, and attended Vassar College, where she began to direct and act in plays. Later she studied play production with David Belasco, and voice and drama with Madame Alberti.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music produced two of Dransfield's earliest plays, *The Romance of Melrose Hall* (1908) and *The Lost Pleiad* (1910). Dransfield often used New York history and culture as the basis for her plays. *Melrose Hall* was inspired by Dransfield's experiences living in Flatbush and her interest in local history. Her play *Joe, A Hudson Valley Play*, was based on the local people she encountered when staying at her summer home in Crugers-on-Hudson.

In the 1920s, Dransfield was a play reader for the Stuart Walker Company. She was chair of the Drama Committee of the Poetry Society of America, where she established the William Lindsey Prize for poetic drama. Dransfield lectured and taught courses on drama and playwriting at colleges and clubs. She was also a theater critic for *The Saturday Review of Literature*. A book of her poems, *Marks Upon a Stone*, was published in 1941.

Dransfield married Clarence DeLano Stone in 1899. They had three children, one of whom died in infancy. She was a proponent of women's suffrage.

## Scope and Content Note

The Jane Dransfield papers (1892-1957, bulk 1908-1956) document Dransfield's work as a writer and lecturer, her study of drama, and her professional relationships. The papers consist of correspondence, clippings, programs, promotional materials, writings, and a small number of photographs. The collection also holds a 1927 portrait of Dransfield by Stella Bowen.

Much of the correspondence concerns the publication and production of Dransfield's plays, poetry, and articles. Correspondence contains rejection and acceptance letters, letters regarding payment and royalties, arrangements for speaking engagements, and reactions to Dransfield's plays, poetry, and lectures. Letters touch on personal topics as well as professional. Correspondents include actor Henrietta Crosman, Ford Madox Ford, and Stuart Walker. Some correspondence is located in dedicated correspondence files, but it can also be found throughout the collection.

Material related to Dransfield's plays consists of handwritten, typewritten, and published scripts; notes; clippings; programs; promotional materials; and correspondence about scripts and productions. Dransfield's playwriting process is documented through drafts, outlines, synopses, and research and background materials. Two plays about New York history, *The Romance of Melrose Hall* and *The Thistle Finch* (also titled *Van Tienhoven*) are particularly well-represented, with story notes, research materials, and revised and draft scripts. The script for *Melrose Hall* was reworked under several titles, including *Betty Shipton* and *Het Dorp (The Town)*. Dransfield often worked on plays about historical figures; the papers contain notes and research materials for unfinished plays about Benedict Arnold, Elizabeth Fry, and Henry IV, among others. A completed script about Stephen Foster is present. The collection includes published scripts for *The Lost Pleiad* and *Joe, A Hudson Valley Story*.

Drafts and clippings of Dransfield's poetry, articles, reviews, and other writings are present, as well as her research and background materials. Among the subjects that Dransfield researched and wrote about are American women playwrights, poetic drama, David Vardi and his production of *The Dybbuk*, and artists Stella Bowen and John Wenger. Dransfield's reviews for *The Saturday Review of Literature* from 1928 to 1930 are held in a scrapbook. An English translation of Marie Lenéru's *Les Affranchis* is also present, along with correspondence regarding Dransfield's intention to translate it.

Lecture material consists of correspondence, research notes, and promotional materials. Lecture subjects include poetic drama and contemporary trends in American playwriting.

Dransfield's notebooks contain research for articles and lectures, notes from classes that she took, personal reminders, personal journal entries, and notes and dialogue for plays.

There is a small amount of material related to the Drama Committee of the Poetry Society of America, mostly concerning the William Lindsey prize and the 1925 prize winner, *The Little Poor Man*. Poetry Society bulletins are also present.

Some documentation of Dransfield's family life and of her activities outside of writing and lecturing can be found in her correspondence and notebooks. The collection holds two personal scrapbooks: a Vassar College scrapbook containing letters, programs, invitations, and other memorabilia, and a scrapbook on David Belasco that contains letters, telegrams, programs, and clippings. The Belasco scrapbook also holds a 1925 article Dransfield wrote in defense of "the Modern Woman" and bobbed hair. Other scrapbooks chiefly contain clippings and letters about Dransfield's work, and articles and reviews she wrote.

**Arrangement:** Materials are arranged in three categories: Correspondence; Scrapbooks; and Writing, Lectures, and Professional Activities. Writing, Lectures, and Professional Activities are further divided into four categories: General, Notebooks, Plays, and Poetry Society of America. General materials are unsorted, and include some papers related to Dransfield's plays and Poetry Society membership. When present, previously assigned NYPL catalog numbers are noted in the container list.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Dramatists  
Lecturers  
Poets

### **Subjects**

Verse drama

### **Names**

Belasco, David, 1853-1931  
Crosman, Henrietta, 1861-1944  
Ford, Ford Madox, 1873-1939  
Walker, Stuart, 1888-1941  
Poetry Society of America  
Stuart Walker Portmanteau Theatre

## Container List

### Correspondence

- b. 15 f. 1-5 1899, 1915-1920, 1953  
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21,262
- b. 13 f. 1-10 1902-1938
- b. 11 f. 7-10 1902, 1913-1954
- b. 12 f. 1-16 1917-1951
- b. 14 f. 1-10 1918-1929
- b. 15 f. 6-7 1940-1944

### Scrapbooks

- b. 16 f. 4 1910, 1920-1925  
MWEZ + n.c. 18,755
- b. 17 1920-1930, 1937-1940  
Includes theater reviews, publicity photographs.
- b. 15 f. 8-9 1921-1929, 1954  
MWEZ + n.c. 18,755
- b. 18 David Belasco 1916-1931  
MWEZ + n.c. 18,809
- b. 19 Vassar College 1892, 1895-1898

### Writing, Lectures, and Professional Activities

#### General

- b. 8 f. 1-9 1894, 1909-1956
- b. 5 f. 5-11 1910s-1953
- b. 9 f. 1-22 1914-1956  
Includes notes for book on American women playwrights, and photographs of Ford Madox Ford and Stuart Walker.
- b. 16 f. 1-3 1917, 1927, undated  
Includes portrait by Stella Bowen.
- b. 7 f. 11 1917-1930s
- b. 11 f. 1-6 1935-1937, 1946, undated
- b. 7 f. 1-10 Notebooks 1910s-1920s
- b. 6 f. 1-11 Notebooks 1913-1930s, 1952

#### Plays

- b. 3 f. 1-12 1900s-1930
- b. 1 f. 7-11 1907-1950
- b. 10 f. 1-14 1908-1928
  - b. 4 f. 1-8 1908-1930s
- b. 2 f. 1-11 1908, 1911, 1918-1934
- b. 5 f. 1-4 1913, 1925-1953
- b. 1 f. 1-6 Poetry Society of America 1919-1927, 950-1951
- b. 8 f. 10-11 Poetry Society of America 1929, 1953-1957