



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Letters from Mary Anderson

1910-1940

*T-Mss 2001-030

Summary

Creator: Wagner, Charles, 1852-1918

Title: Letters from Mary Anderson

Date: 1910-1940

Size: .21 linear feet. (1 box)

Abstract: Mary Anderson was an American actress who performed in both the United States and England in the 1870s and 1880s, retired from the stage in 1889, married, and spent the remaining fifty years of her life in England. Born in Sacramento, California in 1859, Mary Anderson grew up in Kentucky, where her family moved during her childhood, and was educated at the Ursuline Convent in Louisville. She was determined to become an actress from an early age, and at age 15 read for Charlotte Saunders Cushman, who suggested she train in New York. Mary Anderson made her stage debut as Juliet in a Louisville production of *ROMEO & JULIET* in 1875, toured the country, then made her New York debut in *THE LADY OF LYONS* (1877). After touring the United States for the next six years, she made her London debut in *INGOMAR* (1883). During the six years which followed Mary Anderson travelled between America and England, becoming renowned for her Shakespearean performances, especially as Rosalind, Hermione, and Perdita, and starring in several plays by W.S. Gilbert. In 1889 she suffered a nervous breakdown and permanently retired from the stage. In 1890 Mary Anderson married Antonio de Navarro, settled in Worcestershire, England, and worked on occasional literary projects, including a memoir, *A FEW MEMORIES* (1896), a play, *THE GARDEN OF ALLAH* (1911), which she co-authored with Robert Smythe Hichens, and a second volume of memoirs, *A FEW MORE MEMORIES* (1936). Mary Anderson de Navarro died in 1940 at the age of 81. The Mary Anderson papers consist of letters written by Mary Anderson, or on her behalf, between 1910 and 1940, mostly during the last eighteen years of that period, all of them addressed to Charles L. Wagner of New York City. Wagner, who was the manager of Irish tenor John McCormack, supplied Anderson with newspaper clippings and news updates on theatrical and musical doings in the U.S., and in return she wrote him about her friends and acquaintances, including George Bernard Shaw, Helen Hayes, John Gielgud, Cedric Hardwicke, the Charles Dickens family, Neville Chamberlain, and others. She also includes commentary on the American and European political situations, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, and U.S. Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy and his children. Several of the last letters, written when she was ill, were penned on Mary Anderson's behalf by family members or nurses.

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: Letters from Mary Anderson, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Mary Anderson was an American actress who performed in both the United States and England in the 1870s and 1880s, retired from the stage in 1889, married, and spent the remaining fifty years of her life in England. Born in Sacramento, California in 1859, Mary Anderson grew up in Kentucky, where her family moved during her childhood, and was educated at the Ursuline Convent in Louisville. She was determined to become an actress from an early age, and at age 15 read for Charlotte Saunders Cushman, who suggested she train in New York. Mary Anderson made her stage debut as Juliet in a Louisville production of *ROMEO & JULIET* in 1875, toured the country, then made her New York debut in *THE LADY OF LYONS* (1877). After touring the United States for the next six years, she made her London debut in *INGOMAR* (1883). During the six years which followed Mary Anderson travelled between America and England, becoming renowned for her Shakespearean performances, especially as Rosalind, Hermione, and Perdita, and starring in several plays by W.S. Gilbert. In 1889 she suffered a nervous breakdown and permanently retired from the stage. In 1890 Mary Anderson married Antonio de Navarro, settled in Worcestershire, England, and worked on occasional literary projects, including a memoir, *A FEW MEMORIES* (1896), a play, *THE GARDEN OF ALLAH* (1911), which she co-authored with Robert Smythe Hichens, and a second volume of memoirs, *A FEW MORE MEMORIES* (1936). Mary Anderson de Navarro died in 1940 at the age of 81.

Scope and Content Note

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Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence

Geographic Names

Europe -- Politics and government -- 1918-1945

United States -- Politics and government -- 1919-1933

United States -- Politics and government -- 1933-1945

Subjects

Theater -- England

Theater -- United States

Names

Wagner, Charles, 1852-1918

Anderson, Mary, 1859-1940

Chamberlain, Neville, 1869-1940

Hardwicke, Cedric, 1893-1964

Hitler, Adolf, 1889-1945

McCormack, John, 1884-1945

Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962

Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945

Shaw, Bernard, 1856-1950