



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Flagstad-Cornell project files**

1936-1985 [bulk 1960s-1970s]

\*T-Mss 2010-009

Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2015.

## Summary

**Creator:** Hamilton, Nancy, 1908-1985

**Title:** Flagstad-Cornell project files

**Date:** 1936-1985 [bulk 1960s-1970s]

**Size:** 1.7 linear feet (4 boxes)

**Source:** Unknown

**Abstract:** The Flagstad-Cornell project files date from 1936 to 1985 and document Nancy Hamilton's project to preserve a collaboration between opera singer Kirsten Flagstad and actress Katharine Cornell.

**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 Access:

Audiovisual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access. Sound recordings available by appointment only.

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**Preferred citation:** Flagstad-Cornell project files, \*T-Mss 2010-009. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Joyce Joseph, 2015.

**Related Materials:**

Nancy Hamilton papers, 1912-1985. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

## **Creator History**

Kirsten Flagstad (1895-1962) was a Norwegian opera singer.

Katharine Cornell (1893-1974) was an American actress and producer.

Nancy Hamilton (1908-1985) was an American actress, playwright, lyricist, director, and producer. Hamilton and Cornell were lifelong friends and companions who met Flagstad in 1951 after her return to the Metropolitan Opera.

In 1961, Kirsten Flagstad compiled, as a gift to Nancy Hamilton, a selection of her own recordings of Norwegian art songs and German lieder created between 1919 and 1950. Flagstad later sent Hamilton written English translations. To convince Flagstad that her translations were poetic, Hamilton persuaded Katharine Cornell to record the translations. Flagstad died before she was able to hear the collaborative project that came from her initial gift.

After Flagstad's death, Hamilton intended to make this private exchange between friends a public legacy. Hamilton's intentions were to arrange the Flagstad translations for publication in book form, and reissue the Flagstad recordings packaged with Cornell's readings of the translations. This project resulted in the 1977 publication of *Songs without Music*, donations of memorabilia to the Kirsten Flagstad Museum in Norway, and presentations and donations of the Flagstad-Cornell recordings at The Morgan Library & Museum.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Flagstad-Cornell project files date from 1936 to 1985 (bulk dates 1960s-1970s) and document Nancy Hamilton's project to preserve a collaboration between opera singer Kirsten Flagstad and actress Katharine Cornell. The project is based on the Flagstad-Cornell recordings and the Flagstad translations. Files are comprised of correspondence, notes, typescripts, drafts, recordings, legal and financial records, photographs, programs, publications, and clippings.

The Flagstad-Cornell recording files include a few extant recordings, lists and notes with timestamps, and correspondence. The correspondence discusses such matters as redistribution; Flagstad's daughter, Else Dusenberry's letter of approval for the project; and The Eliza Foundation, Inc. attempt to develop a book about the recordings after Hamilton died.

The Flagstad translation files contain several versions of traditional songs translated by Flagstad and typewritten by Hamilton. The *Songs without Music* publication of the translations is reflected through a draft of the text and jacket notes.

The Flagstad correspondence includes letters exchanged between Flagstad and Hamilton conveying their camaraderie throughout the last ten years of Flagstad's life. Hamilton typed Flagstad's letters, wrote notes about their relationship, and utilized these details to describe the project in future correspondence and presentations. The Flagstad correspondence also holds correspondence between Hamilton and Flagstad's family and friends.

The Morgan Library & Museum presentation files relate to Hamilton's 1977 presentation on the Flagstad-Cornell project at the library, and are comprised of correspondence, extensive preparatory notes on her address, and the show outline.

Other project-related materials consist of Hamilton's correspondence with Flagstad's friend, Edwin McArthur, who offered encouragement; correspondence with the Kirsten Flagstad Museum about its establishment and the Flagstad memorabilia Hamilton donated; and legal and financial records, such as a copy of Hamilton's will where she bequeaths all the Flagstad-Cornell recordings to The Morgan Library & Museum.

The Kirsten Flagstad materials provide more details on Flagstad's personal life and career through photographs, programs, clippings, obituaries, and memorial tributes.

**Arrangement:** The collection is organized alphabetically by subject or file type.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Actresses  
Women singers

### **Subjects**

Actresses -- United States  
Women in opera

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings (information artifacts)  
Correspondence  
Drafts (documents)  
Financial records  
notes  
Photographs  
Programs (documents)  
Typescripts

### **Names**

Cornell, Katharine, 1893-1974  
Flagstad, Kirsten, 1895-1962

## Container List

### Flagstad-Cornell Recording Files

- b. 1 f. 1-9 Correspondence 1962-1985
- b. 1 f. 10-14 Lists and Notes 1953-1976  
Includes Cornell Reading.  
**Recordings**  
Sound recordings available by appointment only.
- origf.221015 1977
- origf.221016 1977
- origsr.221017 1977
- origsr.221018 Il Trovatore Intermission Feature 1971  
Metropolitan Opera Broadcast
- b. 1 f. 15-20 Flagstad Translation Files 1961
- b. 2 f. 1-3 Flagstad Translation Files 1977  
Songs without Music materials.
- b. 2 f. 4-13 Flagstad Correspondence 1951-1984
- b. 3 f. 1-7 Morgan Library & Museum Presentation Files 1977  
Materials contain the former "Pierpont Morgan Library" name.  
**Other Project-related Materials**
- b. 3 f. 8-14 Correspondence 1952-1984
- b. 4 f. 1-5 Legal and Financial Records 1976-1977, 1984-1985  
Includes Nancy Hamilton's will.
- b. 4 f. 6-12 Flagstad, Kirsten Materials 1930s-1969