



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Mary Morris papers

1915-1969 [bulk 1940s-1950s]

*T-Mss 1970-006

Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2015

Summary

Creator: Morris, Mary

Title: Mary Morris papers

Date: 1915-1969 [bulk 1940s-1950s]

Size: 5.9 linear feet (15 boxes)

Source: Donated by Estate of Mary Morris, 1970.

Abstract: Mary Morris (1895-1970) was an American stage actress. The collection, dated 1915 to 1969, holds clippings, correspondence, notes, playbills, posters, and writings.

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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Processing note: Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2015

Creator History

Mary Morris (1895-1970) was an American stage actress (not to be confused with the British actress Mary Morris, 1915-1988). In 1916, Morris made her professional stage debut with the Washington Street Players in San Francisco in *The Clod*. In 1923, she garnered critical acclaim for her role as Abbie in Eugene O'Neill's play, *Desire Under the Elms*.

Her extensive stage works include *Camille* produced at the Morosco Theatre (1932); *Double Doors* (on

stage and in the motion picture, 1933); Suspect produced at the St. Martin's Theatre in London (1937); The Father on Broadway (1949); and Musicarnival (1959).

In 1937, Morris received tenure in the Drama Department of the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. She taught acting techniques; developed a program for aspiring actors under the auspices of the National Theatre Conference; directed and produced productions for the local theatres; and served on committees for The American National Theatre and Academy. She occasionally performed professionally on stage. Morris was reticent to discuss her personal life (Bulletin Index, dated October 10, 1958). Published biographical information is limited. She was married to R.V. Richard(sic) around 1919 and subsequently divorced. There was one child named Richard.

Around 1960, Morris retired from the Carnegie Institute and returned to New York City. She died in New York City in 1970.

Scope and Content Note

The collection, dated 1915-1969 (bulk dates 1940s-1950s), documents the performing career of American actress Mary Morris as well as her work as an educator at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. The collection contains clippings, letters, notebooks, notes, playbills, posters, and writings.

The collection consists mostly of correspondence from friends, acquaintances, educators or other individuals in the performing arts. She received congratulatory telegrams for her acting and later her directing skills with regional theatres. Other correspondents wrote about current events on timely topics or events in their lives. The correspondence is alphabetically arranged.

Several incoming letters offer information about her personal life and include letters from her son Richard as a young child. These letters were inter-filed with several letters from caretakers. An income tax statement indicates that she had been divorced. Morris also received letters from a friend in 1919 that addressed the envelope as Mrs. R.V. Richard (sic). The correspondence indicates that she wrote frequently to her friends but did not retain copies of personal letters.

One issue that occasionally arose was the British actress Mary Morris having the exact same name. Actors Equity indicated in their correspondence that the other actor be known as Mary Morris of Great Britain.

The files also document how Morris transitioned from an actor to an educator during the late 1940s through teaching acting to drama students and assuming the responsibility to develop theatrical programs to showcase aspiring actors under the auspices of the National Theatre Conference.

These files document that she worked in consultation with George Freedley of the New York Public Library, the leading educator Sawyer Falk, and other educators.

Morris retained typed copies of her work for the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh, the National Theatre Conference and other related organizations. Documentation about these institutions is located throughout the collection.

The writings of notes and notebooks created by Morris reflect her work as an educator. Morris's cursive style of handwriting renders her notes nearly illegible. The writings include notes that indicate one or several meetings were held by a committee on efficiency and economy during the late 1930s;

notebooks and notes that focused on classroom exercises for students on acting; her thoughts on the portrait of an actress; a notebook on the play Richard the III; a notebook on an unidentified play during the year 1961; and some additional notes on Shakespeare and acting. Her notes and notebooks remain in their original location in the collection and do not necessarily reflect the other files in that particular box.

The scripts document theatrical productions that reflect Morris's work as an actor and an educator. Most of the scripts were written by other playwrights. Morris's scripts are An Evening of Poetry and writing; lasta's production of Electra by Sophocles, and Rodina Rehearsing Electra (single chapter).

The Printed Matter consists of clippings documenting her performances in theatres in the United States and abroad in Great Britain; posters from the First Unitarian Church where she directed plays; playbills from the Carnegie Institute; playbills and from her performances.

The MWEZ numbers represent the Library's former classification system. When requesting materials, please refer to the finding aid's box list.

Key Terms

Subjects

Acting
Acting -- Study and teaching
Carnegie Institute of Technology. Department of Fine Arts

Occupations

Actors
Educators

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings
notes
Playbills
Posters

Names

Falk, Sawyer, 1898-1961
Freedley, George, 1904-1967
National Theatre Conference

Container List

Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1-13 A - Z 1939-1961
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 312
- b. 2 f. 1-15 A - Z 1935-1962
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 3 f. 1-15 A - P 1915, 1941-1969
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 314
- b. 4 f. 1-3 S - Z circa 1915-1969
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 314
- b. 4 f. 4-15 A - Z 1939-1964
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 315
- b. 5 f. 1-16 A - Z 1918, 1926-1957
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 316
- b. 6 f. 1-15 A - Z 1919, 1931-1957
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 317
- b. 7 f. 1-15 A - Z 1922-1958
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 318
- b. 8 f. 1-13 A - Z 1934-1961
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 319
- b. 9 f. 1-10 A - Z 1932-1962
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 320
- b. 10 f. 1-9 A - Z 1936-1955
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 370
- b. 10 f. 12-14 A, N 1937-1955
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 21-22 A 1951-1962
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 372
- b. 12 f. 1-4 G - P 1940-1955
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 372
- b. 9 f. 11 Family Correspondence 1937, 1939
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 320

Scripts and Writings

Notes

- b. 2 f. 12 Notes 1937
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 2 f. 14 Notebooks and Notes about Carnegie 1947
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 9 f. 13 Acting and remarks on Portrait of an Actress circa 1930s-1960s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 320
- b. 9 f. 14 Notebooks 1961
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 320
- b. 12 f. 5 Shakespeare and Acting circa 1930s-1960s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 372

Writings

- b. 12 f. 6 Hansen. Walderman. The Garden of Sweets 1961

Scripts and Writings (cont.)

Writings (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 7 Howard, Sidney. Lute Song circa 1950
8-MWEZ + n.c. 314
- b. 12 f. 8 Komai, Felicia. Cry, the Beloved Country 1937
Morris, Mary
- b. 13 f. 1-3 An Evening of Poetry and Drama circa 1955
- b. 10 f. 10 Iasta's Production of Electra by Sophocles 1961
*-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 370
- b. 10 f. 11 Rondins. Rehearsing Electra at Iasta 1961
*-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 370
- Riggs, Lynn
- b. 13 f. 4 (The) Cream in the Well circa 1930s-1960s
- b. 13 f. 5 Dark Encounters circa 1930s-1960s
- b. 13 f. 6 Laughter. From a Cloud 1946
- Totheroh, Dan
- b. 13 f. 7 Live Life Again 1945
- b. 13 f. 8 Mother Isn't Strong. A Comedy of Manners circa 1945
- b. 13 f. 9 Ware, John. Mary Baker 1933
- b. 13 f. 10 Wilde, Oscar. The Importance of Being Earnest circa 1930s-1960s
- b. 13 f. 11 Wolfson, Victor. Love in the City 1947

Printed Matter

Clippings

- b. 11 f. 1 Behind Red Lights 1937
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 2 Double Door 1934
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 3 Granite circa 1930s-1950s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 4 Plumes in the Dust 1936
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 5 Roosty 1937
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 6-7 Suspect 1937
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 8 Uncle Harry circa 1930s-1950s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 9 Women of Property 1937
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 10 (The) Would Be Gentleman circa 1930s-1950s
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 11 f. 11 1930-1958
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371

Pamphlet

- b. 1 f. 2 Berwick, Kester. Becoming an Actor 1949
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 312

Playbills

Printed Matter (cont.)

Playbills (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 17-20 **1932-1962**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 2 f. 13 **1939-1953**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 2 f. 6 **Carnegie Theatre of Pittsburgh 1956-1960**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 15 f. 1-3 **Carnegie Theatre of Pittsburgh circa 1930s-1960s (Oversize documents)**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 11 f. 16 **Cry the Beloved Country 1937**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 371
- b. 2 f. 7 **First Unitarian Church 1955**
8-MWEZ + n.c. 21, 313
- b. 14 f. 1 **(The) Piper 1921**
Admissions ticket.

Posters

- b. 2 f. 9 **First Unitarian Church circa 1955**

Assorted Material

- b. 14 f. 2-3 **Income Taxes 1935-1960**