

# **Guide to the Sara Mildred Strauss Papers, 1905-1977**

**(S)\*MGZMD 169**

**Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York**

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Date Completed: March 2006

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## Descriptive Summary

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Sara Mildred Strauss Papers</b>
<b>Collection ID:</b>	<b>(S)*MGZMD 169</b>
<b>Creator:</b>	<b>Strauss, Sara Mildred</b>
<b>Extent:</b>	<b>4.5 linear feet (9 boxes)</b>
<b>Repository:</b>	<b>Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts</b>

**Abstract:** The Sara Mildred Strauss Papers document the professional life of this twentieth-century dance instructor, choreographer, and writer. This collection contains correspondence, professional papers, drafts of her writings, drawings, clippings, scrapbooks, and photographs. The majority of the materials date from the late 1920s to the 1960s. Only a small part of the collection refers to Sara Mildred Strauss's personal life.

## Administrative Information

### Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

### Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

### Preferred Citation

Sara Mildred Strauss Papers, (S)\*MGZMD 169, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

### Custodial History

The Sara Mildred Strauss Papers were donated to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in 1989 by Elizabeth B. Lindsay.

## Biographical Note

Sara Mildred Strauss (Newman) was born in 1896. She was a dance teacher, choreographer, and author of two books and several articles on body movement and posture. She established dance schools in Carnegie Hall and the Ziegfeld Theater roof in New York; for a short period she supervised a dance studio in Hollywood, while qualified instructors taught the Strauss Technique in several states. Sara Mildred Strauss also organized summer schools in Europe. Apart from dancers, many famous actors studied body movement and posture in her studios. After a short stay in Hollywood, she returned to New York and joined the teaching staff at the Action Department of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, where she remained for about fifteen years.

In 1932 she collaborated with several dance instructors, dancers and other professionals to advocate for the change of a bill that would allow concert dancing on Sundays. An interesting text written by Sara Mildred Strauss on the background and her observations on the process that led to the change of this bill can be found in box 2, folder 6.

As a choreographer, Sara Mildred Strauss directed and produced for *The Ziegfeld Follies*, *Ed Wynn's Show*, *Calling All Stars* (1934-1935), J.J. Shubert musicals, and the dances for the motion picture *Sweet Surrender* (1935). She also choreographed for vaudeville and Broadway shows, Boston Symphony concerts and several nightclubs in New York, Florida, Chicago and Monte Carlo.

She was the author of two books. *The Dance and Life*: Brooklyn Eagle Press, New York, 1916, is an early treatise on dance and emotions, which she wrote at a relatively young age. A much more mature work that encapsulates her experience after many years of teaching is *Here an Inch, There an Inch*, Prentice-Hall: New York 1966. It is a book on posture and exercise in everyday life. Several short articles on the same subject were published in *Family Circle Magazine* between 1962-1966.

### Sources:

- *New Milford Times*, Connecticut, May 4, 1961
- *Dance Magazine*, May 1956, p. 36-39
- *Internet Broadway Database*, <http://www.ibdb.com/>

## Scope and Content Note

The Sara Mildred Strauss Papers document the professional life of the twentieth-century dance instructor, choreographer, producer and writer. This collection contains correspondence, biographical notes, materials related to the dance schools and professional dance groups trained by Sara Mildred Strauss, drafts and final versions of her writings, drawings, clippings and scrapbooks, and photographs of Sara Mildred Strauss, her students, and shows for which she choreographed. The majority of the material dates from the late 1920s to the 1960s and focus on her professional life, with only a small portion documenting her personal life. There are no audiovisual materials in this collection. Several photographs of buildings in Austria and Germany from 1929-1930 might be of interest to researchers.

## Related Materials Note

- Materials related to Sara Strauss and complementing the present collection can be found at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, William Madison Randall Library, Manuscripts Collection, Sara Mildred Strauss Newman Collection, Accession Number 199. (<http://library.uncwil.edu/web/collections/manuscript/ms199.html>).
- Several photographs of Sara Mildred Strauss and pupils between 1926-1941 can be found online at the *Art Museum Images from Cartography Associates* (AMICA) Library ([http://www.davidrumsey.com/amico/amico4\\_list6.html](http://www.davidrumsey.com/amico/amico4_list6.html)).

## Organization

The collection is organized into six series. They are:

- Series I: Correspondence, 1917-1977 and undated
- Series II: Professional Papers, 1919-1966 and undated
- Series III: Writings and Drawings, 1905-1967 and undated
- Series IV: Clippings, 1918-1973 and undated
- Series V: Photographs, 1926-1946 and undated
- Series VI: Oversized materials, 1928-1945 and undated

## Series Descriptions

### **Series I: Correspondence, 1917-1977 and undated**

**1 box**

Arrangement: Alphabetical. Folders 8 and 9 are arranged chronologically.

This series contains correspondence to Sara Mildred Strauss related to her personal life and various professional activities. Letters are arranged by last name, or first name if a

last name is not mentioned. Letters written by Sara Mildred Strauss, her husband (I. Bear Newman), or assistants on her behalf are filed along with the sender's letters, to which they respond. Among the correspondents that can be found in this series are Grace, Princess of Monaco (box 1, folder 4), Helen Hayes (box 1, folder 4), and Sir Reginald Croom-Johnson (box 1, folder 2). Folders 8 and 9 are arranged chronologically and document the collaboration between Sara Mildred Strauss and her dancing group in California in 1937-1938. They are referred to as "Strauss Ballet" in official documents, and not "Strauss Dancers", which was the most common name her dancing groups were known as.

**Series II: Professional Papers, 1919-1966 and undated** **1 box**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, and chronological within folders.

This series contains evidence of Sara Mildred Strauss's professional activities, primarily documenting her career as dance instructor and choreographer. It includes drafts and final copies of biographical notes provided by her or written by critics for use in school leaflets, and lists of names and contact information of several former students. There are also leaflets and announcements of instruction schools, courses and workshops that Sara Strauss organized. They include recreation courses for children (see also photographs in box 6, folders 18-19); courses conducted in Europe (see also photographs in box 6, folders 1-8; and box 9, folder 1 for a unique copy of an announcement of her first European course in 1929); announcements and invitations of events organized by Sara Mildred Strauss, or in which she participated, and repertoire notes of performances by dance groups trained by her. Finally, a proposal for the formation of "The Dance Institute of America" (1934) and a list of her professional activities in 1934-1935 can be found in this series (box 2, folder 6).

**Series III: Writings and drawings, 1905-1967 and undated** **2 boxes**

Arrangement: Alphabetical.

This series contains Sara Strauss's writings and drawings, as well as a draft written by her mother describing a series of trips they took together. Her writings include drafts and published articles on body posture and exercise, which Sara Strauss published in *Family Circle Magazine* during the 1960s. Drafts in box 3, folders 2 and 3 are complete with Sara Strauss's own sketches of posture and movement examples for each step analyzed in the articles. There are also clippings from the published version (box 3, folder 4). As they are the result of sometimes considerable editing, titles often do not correspond to those submitted by Sara Strauss, and her drawings have been replaced. This series also includes a copy of Sara Strauss's first book, *The Dance and Life* published in 1916, and drafts of text for Sara Strauss's book *Here an Inch, There an Inch*, published by Prentice-Hall in 1966. The text of another manuscript, *Instant Figure Improvement for the Modern Woman*, appears to be a draft of a different work, completed in ca. 1965.

Her drawings are both in color and pencil. Only a small number is dated and signed. There is also a series of several sketches of example drawings (box 4, folder 7). They are similar to those accompanying the drafts for her articles (box 3, folders 2 and 3), but not identifiably related to any text found in the collection. Finally, material from Sara Strauss's early years includes booklets from schools she attended, as well as descriptions

and clippings referring to horse and carriage trips to Canada, which she took with her mother. A draft of an undated manuscript of one such trip's description by Mrs. Lehman Strauss can also be found here. Excerpts from this manuscript are quoted in the newspaper clippings.

**Series IV: Clippings, 1918-1973 and undated**

**1 box**

Arrangement: Chronological.

This series contains loose newspaper clippings; mounted cards with clippings, announcement and invitation cards, programs, and a few photographs from Sara Mildred Strauss's dance groups. It also contains a clippings scrapbook, likely put together by Strauss herself. The clippings range from reviews and commentaries of her published works, her teaching approaches and philosophy, advertisements of her various instructional programs and courses at her dance schools, and interviews. There are also some articles on developments in American Ballet and other dance traditions. Her *Living Movement Figure* dolls and book *Here an Inch, There an Inch* are thoroughly covered in box 5, folder 3, with photographs, advertisements, announcements, order forms and reviews.

Additional magazine clippings and mounted cards can be found in the oversized series.

**Series V: Photographs, 1926-1946 and undated**

**2 boxes**

Arrangement: Alphabetical.

This series contains photographs related to Sara Mildred Strauss's career as dance and movement instructor. It includes photographs from training sessions with her pupils at various locations of her School of Dance, as well as children with which she worked. There is also a significant number of photographs from two of the three European courses she organized to Germany, Austria and France between 1928 and 1930. Many of these photographs are mounted on cards, often with captions, and depict training sessions on deck during traveling and outdoors, sightseeing trips, picnics and leisure time with her students and local instructors.

This series also contains photographs from the dance numbers Sara Strauss choreographed for various performances, including *Calling All Stars*, *Carioca*, *Song of the Bayou* and *Savage Serenade*, and the motion picture *Sweet Surrender*; and two scrapbooks with photographs, clippings, and copies of school leaflets, probably compiled by Sara Strauss herself. They record her dance productions and School of Dance, both dated 1935.

Photographs of the Living Movement Figure dolls, created by Sara Strauss in the early 1940s, are divided according to the two main uses the dolls were put, dressed in various costumes for advertisement or shop windows, and dance instruction. Finally, several photographs of Sara Strauss dancing and portraits are also included. They date from most of her adult years.

**Series VI: Oversized, 1928-1945 and undated**

**2 boxes**

This series contains oversized clippings, photographs, and drawings by Sara Mildred Strauss and F.K. Detwiller. All drawings represent images of several female bodies in dance postures and configurations.

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><u>Series I: Correspondence, 1917-1977 and undated</u></b>	
<b>Box 1</b>	
F. 1	A-C, 1937-1972 and undated
F. 2	Croom-Johnson, Sir, Reginald, 1945-1955 (includes six photographs of him)
F. 3	D-F, 1958-1972
F. 4	G-I, 1917-1968 and undated
F. 5	J-L, 1917-1960 and undated
F. 6	M, 1920-1967 (includes two letters from Jean Monet, and clippings related to his policies)
F. 7	N-S, 1928-1972 and undated Strauss Ballet
F. 8	Letters, 1937-1938 and undated (arranged chronologically)
F. 9	Telegrams, 1938 (arranged chronologically)
F. 10	T-Z, 1940-1977
F. 11	Cards and invitations, undated
<b><u>Series II: Professional Papers, 1919-1966 and undated</u></b>	
<b>Box 2</b>	
F. 1	Biographical notes and press releases, 1934-1966 and undated Dance instruction, 1919-1939 and undated
F. 2	Former student lists, undated
F. 3	Schools, courses, workshops, 1919-1939 and undated (includes a leaflet of Leo Kehl's School of Dance in Madison, Wisconsin) Dance performances and exhibits, 1926-1938 and undated
F. 4	Announcements and invitations, 1926-1929 and undated
F. 5	Programs and repertoire notes, 1932-1938 and undated
F. 6	Professional activities, 1934-1935
<b><u>Series III: Writings and Drawings, 1905-1967 and undated</u></b>	
<b>Box 3</b>	
	Articles, 1961-1967 and undated
F. 1	Drafts, text only, undated
F. 2	Drafts with drawings, B-I, 1961-1962 and undated
F. 3	Drafts with drawings, S-T, 1962-1967 and undated
F. 4	Published articles, 1962-1966
	Books, 1916-1966
F. 5	"The Dance and Life", 1916
F. 6	"Instant Figure Improvement for the Modern Woman", 1965 (with corrections. Includes references to drawings, figures and illustrations that are not found in the collection)
<b>Box 4</b>	
	Books, 1916-1966 (cont.)
	"Here an Inch, There an Inch", 1966
F. 1	Table of contents
F. 2	Part I – Physical Technique
F. 3	Part II – Form
F. 4	Part III – Emotion and Imagination
F. 5	Part IV – Creation
	Drawings, 1928-1960s and undated
F. 6	Drawings, 1928-1932 and undated
F. 7	Drawings for articles, ca. 1960s
	Early years, 1905-1911 and undated

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>
F. 8	School booklets 1907-1915
F. 9	Trips with mother 1905-1911 and undated
	<b><u>Series IV: Clippings, 1918-1973 and undated</u></b>
<b>Box 5</b>	
	Loose clippings
F. 1	1918-1938
F. 2	1941-1973 and undated
F. 3	Mounted cards, 1928-1933
F. 4	Scrapbook, 1935-1938
	<b><u>Series V: Photographs, 1926-1946 and undated</u></b>
<b>Box 6</b>	
	Instruction, 1929-1932 and undated
	European courses, 1929-1930
F. 1-2	1929
F. 3-8	1930
F. 9	Posture examples, undated
F. 10-17	Training sessions, 1932 and undated
	Work with children, undated
F. 18	Indoors, undated
F. 19	Outdoors, undated
<b>Box 7</b>	
	Living Movement Figure, ca. 1941
F. 1-5	Costumes, ca. 1941
F. 6-8	Dance instruction, ca. 1941
	Sara Strauss, 1926-1946 and undated
F. 9	Dancing, undated
F. 10	Portraits, undated
F. 11	School years, undated
F. 12	With groups, 1926-1946 and undated
	Strauss Dancers, 1935 and undated
F. 13	Scrapbooks, 1935
	Performances, 1935 and undated
F. 14	<i>Sweet Surrender</i> , 1935
F. 15	Various performances, 1935 and undated
	<b><u>Series VI: Oversized Materials, 1928-1945 and undated</u></b>
<b>Box 8</b>	
	Drawings, 1929 and undated
F. 1-2	Drawings by Sara Strauss, undated
F. 3-6	Drawings by F.K. Detwiller, 1929 and undated
<b>Box 9</b>	
	Clippings, 1928-1945 and undated
F. 1	1928-1929
F. 2	1930-1936
F. 3	1941-1945
F. 4	Undated
F. 5-7	Photographs, undated