

**The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts,
Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Billy Rose Theatre Division**

**Guide to the Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and Production Materials for
The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table
1920s-1988**

*T-Mss 2010-110

Compiled by Michael Messina, May 2011

Summary

- Creator:** Slesin, Aviva
- Title:** Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and Production Materials for The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table, 1920s-1988
- Size:** 2 linear feet (4 boxes)
- Source:** This collection was donated to the New York Public Library by Aviva Slesin in 2010.
- Abstract:** Aviva Slesin (b.1943) is a documentary filmmaker based in New York City whose film *The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit And Legend Of The Algonquin Round Table* won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature of 1987. The Algonquin Round Table was a group of journalists, editors, actors and press agents that met on a regular basis at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City. The group began having lunch together in June 1919 and continued on a regular basis for about eight years. In her research for *The Ten Year Lunch* Slesin acquired significant materials from numerous sources about the core group of the Round Table including Marc Connelly, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, Ruth Gordon, and Edna Ferber, as well as satellite figures. Types of materials in this collection include photographs (both originals and copies), personal correspondence and ephemera, telegrams, sound recordings, a script, theatre programs, posters, and bound volumes.
- Access:** Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.
- Preferred citation:** Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and Production Materials for The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats:** Photographs, Playbills, Script, Sound Recordings, Posters

Historical Note

Aviva Slesin (b.1943) is a documentary filmmaker based in New York City. Her film *The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit And Legend Of The Algonquin Round Table* won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature of 1987. Born in Lithuania, as an infant, Slesin's Jewish parents handed her to a Lithuanian family for safekeeping from the Nazis. Reunited with her mother after the war, the family moved to New York City in 1953, and later to Montreal. Slesin studied for two years at McGill University before returning to New York in 1965. In New York, she began a long career as a film editor and director.

Slesin was nominated for the Sundance Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize for her 1986 documentary *Directed by William Wyler*. Slesin also won the 2002 Inspirational Film Award for *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During WWII*. Both *Directed by William Wyler* and *Secret Lives* were also nominated for Emmy Awards. She is currently a faculty member at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

The Algonquin Round Table was a group of journalists, editors, actors, and press agents that met on a regular basis at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City. The group began having lunch together in June 1919 and continued on a regular basis for about eight years. The core group of the Round Table included Dorothy Parker, Marc Connelly, Alexander Woollcott, Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, Ruth Gordon, and Edna Ferber, all documented in this collection, and there were about 24 members in all. They wrote hit plays, bestselling books, drama criticism, and popular newspaper columns, and their impact and wit is still felt today.

Scope and Content Note

The Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and Production Materials for *The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table* documents the creation of this Academy Award-winning film. In her research for *The Ten-Year Lunch* Slesin acquired photographs, theatre programs, and other materials about the Round Table from numerous sources including the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, and private collections.

Types of research materials in this collection include photographs (both originals and copies), posters, personal correspondence and ephemera, telegrams, sound recordings, and bound volumes. The work of notable photographers such as James Abbe, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Nickolas Muray, and Carl Van Vechten, are included. Slesin's production notebook includes a descriptive listing of 702 items that she consulted during her research, most of which are in this final collection. The final script for the film is accompanied by a promotional poster illustrated with a drawing of the Round Table members by legendary theatre caricaturist Al Hirschfeld.

Slesin acquired significant materials from numerous sources about the core group of the Round Table including Marc Connelly, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, Ruth Gordon, and Edna Ferber. Locations that are also documented include Atlantic City, Europe, and Neshobe Island in Vermont, where members of the Round Table vacationed in the 1920s and 1930s.

The sound recordings are oral history interviews of key members and satellite figures of the Round Table. Among those included in the 14 interviews are Helen Hayes, W. Averell Harriman, Dorothy Parker, Garson Kanin, Ruth Gordon, Marc Connelly, Margalo Gillmore, and Tallulah Bankhead.

One highlight of the collection is an original list written by Dorothy Parker entitled "Unattractive Authors Whose Works I Admire." Another is a photograph of the four Marx brothers and their father, with each signing their name, and Groucho writing that he was "the only Marx who can spell Mankiewicz," a reference to Herman Mankiewicz, the American screenwriter. Also included are four bound volumes published by the Dutch Treat Club between 1924 and 1939. The Club, founded in 1905 and still active today, consists of members from the worlds of literature, art, media, music, and drama. In the 1920s and 1930s, Round Table regulars Marc Connelly and Robert E. Sherwood wrote and acted in entertainments put on by the Club.

Slesin's original folder titles have been largely maintained in the Container List that follows.

Key Terms

Subjects

Algonquin Round Table
American wit and humor – History and criticism
Authors, American -- 20th century – Biography
Humorists, American – 20th century – Biography
New Yorker (New York, N.Y. : 1925)

Occupations

Actors – United States
Authors – United States
Dramatists – United States
Editors – United States
Humorists – United States
Journalists – United States
Press Agents – United States

Names

Bankhead, Tallulah, 1902-1968
Benchley, Robert, 1889-1945
Connelly, Marc, 1890-1980
Ferber, Edna, 1887-1968
Gillmore, Margalo, 1897-1986
Gordon, Ruth, 1896-1985
Harriman, W. Averell (William Averell), 1891-1986
Hayes, Helen, 1900-1993
Parker, Dorothy, 1893-1967
Ross, Harold Wallace, 1892-1951
Woollcott, Alexander, 1887-1943

Container List

Research Materials

- b.1 f.1 Abbe, James. Includes photographs.
- b.1 f.2 Adams, Franklin P. Includes photographs.
- b.1 f.3 Algonquin Hotel [1 of 2]. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.1 f.4 Algonquin Hotel [2 of 2]. Includes a playbill, menu, hotel account card, and printed materials.
- b.1 f.5 Arden House. Includes a photograph.
- b.1 f.6 Armistice. Includes photographs and postcards.
- b.1 f.7 Atlantic City. Includes a photograph.
- b.1 f.8 *Beggar on Horseback*, 1930-1939. Includes typed correspondence and royalty statements.
- b.1 f.9 Benchley, Robert. Includes photographs.
- b.1 f.10 Broun, Heywood and Ruth Hale. Includes photographs.
- b.1 f.11 Claire, Ina and Tallulah Bankhead and Kit Cornell. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.1 f.12 Connelly, Marc. Includes photographs, printed materials, a clipping, and a postcard.
- b.1 f.13 Connelly, Marc and George S. Kaufman – Theatre programs. Includes programs and printed materials.
- b.1 f.14 Croquet. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.1 Deitz, Howard and Alexander Woollcott. Includes photographs, telegrams, typed correspondence, and typed manuscript pages.
- b.2 f.2 *Dulcy*, 1928-1936. Includes typed correspondence, clippings, and royalty statements.
- b.2 f.3 *Dutch Treat Club Yearbook*, Rogers & Company, Number 514, 1924.
- b.2 f.4 *Dutch Treat Club Twenty Fifth Anniversary Year Book*, Rogers-Kellogg-Stillson Company, 1930.
- b.2 f.5 *Dutch Treat Club Code Book*, Beck Engraving Company, 1934.

- b.2 f.6 *Dutch Treat Sampler, Earlie To Bed And Earlie To Rise*, Beck Engraving Company, 1939.
- b.2 f.7 Europe: French Riviera, Monte Carlo and other locations. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.8 Ferber, Edna. Includes photographs and a clipping.
- b.2 f.9 Gillmore, Margalo. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.10 Gordon, Ruth. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.11 Group shots. Includes photographs and a clipping.
- b.2 f.12 Harriman, W. Averell. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.13 Hayes, Helen and Charles MacArthur. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.14 Heifetz, Jascha. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.15 Held, Jr., John. Includes a photograph, typed list, contact sheets and negatives.
- b.2 f.16 Hirschfeld, Al. Includes printed materials, a photograph, and negatives.
- b.2 f.17 Historical material: Lucy Stone, Lindbergh, The Depression, The KKK, Sacco and Vanzetti. Includes photographs.
- b.2 f.18 Hollywood. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.1 Interviews and Chronologies [1 of 2]. Includes typed manuscript pages.
- b.3 f.2 Interviews and Chronologies [2 of 2]. Includes typed manuscript pages.
- b.3 f.3 Kaufman, George S. and Bea Kaufman. Includes photographs and a negative.
- b.3 f.4 *Life*. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.3 f.5 The Lunts-Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.6 Mankiewicz, Herman. Includes photographs, postcards, telegrams, printed materials, sheet music, and a notebook.
- b.3 f.7 The Marx Brothers. Includes photographs, clippings, and printed material.
- b.3 f.8 McMein, Neysa. Includes photographs and a slide.
- b.3 f.9 Miller, Alice Duer. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.3 f.10 Neshobe Island. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.11 New York City locations. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.12 *New Yorker*. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.3 f.13 *No Siree!* Includes a photograph.
- b.3 f.14 Notes and transcripts on film interviews. Includes typed manuscript pages.

- b.3 f.15 Ocean liners. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.16 Parker, Dorothy. Includes photographs, negative, handwritten notes.
- b.3 f.17 Pemberton, Murdock. Includes photographs, playbill, typed manuscripts, printed materials, and clippings.
- b.3 f.18 Prohibition and crash. Includes photographs.
- b.3 f.19 Ross, Harold. Includes photographs and a negative.
- b.4 f.1 Satellites (A-L). Includes photographs.
- b.4 f.2 Satellites (M-Z). Includes photographs.
- b.4 f.3 Sherwood, Robert E. and Madeline Connelly. Includes photographs.
- b.4 f.4 Theatre Material and Sheet Music. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.4 f.5 *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. Includes photographs and printed materials.
- b.4 f.6 Wood, Peggy and John Weaver. Includes photographs.
- b.4 f.7 Woollcott, Alexander. Includes photographs, negative, printed materials, a pencil, and typed correspondence.

Production Materials

- b.4 f.8 Notebook.
- b.4 f.9 The Ten-Year Lunch...Final Script, July 1987.
- b.4 Poster, "The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit And Legend Of The Algonquin Round Table, Academy Award 1987 Best Documentary Feature." Features a reproduction of a drawing by Al Hirschfeld of the Round Table members.

Separated Materials

Audiocassette tapes separated to the Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at the Library of the Performing Arts. Transcripts of these interviews are included in the Research Materials section of this finding aid. The tapes are as identified as follows:

- #28: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Mark (sic) Connelly Sound Roll 1; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Marc Connely (sic)-Sound Roll-2
- #28: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Mark (sic) Connelly Sound Rolls: 1; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Mark (sic) Connelly-Sound Roll: 2
- #29: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Side 1: Ruth Gorden (sic), Garsin Kannin (sic). Sound Rolls 3-4; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Side 2: Ruth Gorden (sic), Garsin Kannin (sic). Sound Rolls 5-6
- #29: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Side 1: Ruth Gorden (sic)/Garson Kanin Sound Roll 3. Sound Roll 4; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Side 2: Ruth Gorden (sic). Garson Kannin (sic). Sound Rolls 5-6
- #30: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Miss Moats. Sound Roll: 7; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Ms. Alice Moats. Sound Roll: 8
- #30: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Miss Moats. Sound Rolls: 7; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Ms. Alice Moats. Sound Rolls: 8
- #31: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Averill (sic) Harriman. S. R. 9; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Averill (sic) Harriman. S. R. 10
- #31: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Averill (sic) Harriman. S. R. 9; Side B: Alagonquin (sic): Averill (sic) Harriman. S. R. 10
- #32: Side A: Alagonquin (sic): Margalo Gillmore-S.R. 11; Side B: Alagonquin: Margalo Gillmore-S.R. 11
- #32: Side A: Alagonquin: Margalo Gillmore S.R. 11; Side B: Alagonquin: Margalo Gillmore S.R. 11
- #33: Side A: Alagonquin: Helen Hayes. S. R. 12; Side B: Alagonquin: Helen Hayes S.R. 12
- #33: Side A: Alagonquin: Helen Hayes S. R. 12; Side B: Alagonquin: Helen Hayes S.R. 12
- #36: D. Parker-by Joan Franklin/Columbia, 1959 on both sides

#20, only copy: Side 1: Richard Lamparski interviewed Dorothy Parker; Side 2: D. Parker by R. Lamparski + Tallulah Bankhead. Note says: D.P. describes R. Benchly (sic); ½ into side 1: social consciousness of her “circle”- had none; admiration for H. Broun-most courageous of men (H.B.) “had to be, he hadn’t any”