

Carolina Playmakers collection of playbills and programs

Ms. Coll. 1325

Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Carolina Playmakers.
Creator	Koch, Frederick H. (Frederick Henry), 1877-1944
Title	Carolina Playmakers collection of playbills and programs
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1325
Date [inclusive]	1918-1953
Extent	1 linear foot (4 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Carolina Playmakers was the theatrical company in residence at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, from 1918 to 1976, when it was succeeded by the PlayMakers Repertory Company. Although they often staged classic and contemporary plays, the Playmakers specialized in the writing and production of folk plays, a dramatic genre "concerned... with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people." The Carolina Playmakers collection of playbills and programs consists of about 350 items documenting the theatrical activities organized or sponsored by the Playmakers, Frederick H. Koch, and, more generally, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, between 1918 and 1953.</p>

Cite as:

Carolina Playmakers collection of playbills and programs, 1918-1953, MS. Coll. 1325, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

The Carolina Playmakers was the theatrical company in residence at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, from 1918 to 1976, when it was succeeded by the PlayMakers Repertory Company, currently active. The Playmakers were established by English professor Frederick Henry Koch (1877-1944), who modeled the new company after the example set by the Dakota Playmakers, another dramatic group that Koch had founded in previous years, when he was a faculty member at the University of North Dakota. The following note on Koch and the Carolina Playmakers is excerpted from Koch's biographical sketch written by Samuel Selden for the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, vol. 3, p. 381):

"Koch grew up in Illinois. He attended Peoria High School and Caterals Methodist College, then Ohio Wesleyan, from which he was graduated with the A.B. degree in 1900. Wishing passionately to become an actor, he spent some time at the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston, but when his family frowned on his histrionic ambition, Koch enrolled at Harvard to study English literature. Unable to stifle completely his thespian urge, however, he traveled around the countryside giving readings of Shakespeare. He was awarded the M.A. degree in 1909."

"At Harvard, Koch fell under the dramatic influence of George Pierce Baker who was, at the time, stirring a group of young men and women to write plays on Native American subjects. After graduation, Koch took an extended trip to Greece, North Africa, Syria, Egypt, and Palestine. At Athens he met an Irish-American girl, Loretta Jean Hanigan, whom he married in 1910. They had four sons: Frederick, George, Robert, and William. From 1905 to 1918, Koch taught English at the University of North Dakota where, besides conducting courses in literature, he founded the Dakota Playmakers. The Playmakers produced one-act plays on the life of the state, written by students. The plays were trouped around North Dakota and presented to schools and communities, some of which had never before seen a dramatic performance."

"Informed of the singularly productive work being done by Professor Koch in the Midwest, President Edward Kidder Graham of The University of North Carolina wished to develop similar creative activity at his institution. In 1918, he wrote to Koch and persuaded him to come to the Southeast. In Chapel Hill, Koch taught dramatic literature and playwriting for twenty-six years. Young men and women from every section of the state came to work with him, and they were soon joined by students from other states, then from abroad; Canada, England, Germany, Egypt, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Mexico, Chile, and elsewhere. Among the dramatists, novelists, and short-story writers (authors, who were inspired and guided in one way or another by the lively theater man from the Midwest) were Thomas Wolfe, Paul Green, Betty Smith, Jonathan Daniels, Noel Houston, Joseph Mitchell, Frances Gray Patton, Bernice Kelly Harris, Le Gette Blythe, Howard Richardson, and Josefina Niggli."

"To provide a means for his authors to see their work in performances, Koch organized a producing

group, the Carolina Playmakers, modeled on the Playmakers of North Dakota. Many of the actors, directors, dancers, and designers who received instruction at The University of North Carolina later entered the professional world of the stage, motion pictures, and television. The university group--again following the example of the Dakota students--trouped their plays all over North Carolina, and extended their tours to such far-off places as New York, Boston, Dallas, and St. Louis."

"With the help of the University Extension Department and its associates, Koch established a Bureau of Community Drama, with a field secretary, which developed dramatic centers in other parts of the state. The productions of high school, college, and community groups were brought yearly to the university in Chapel Hill where they were staged in a spring Festival. Thirty years after Koch's death, the yearly Festival was still being held."

"Selected student-written plays were published by Koch in five volumes: *Carolina Folk Plays* (in four series) and *American Folk Plays*. He sponsored single authors' works in *Alabama Folk Plays*, by Kate Porter Lewis; *Folk Plays of Eastern Carolina*, by Bernice Kelly Harris; and *Mexican Folk Plays*, by Josefina Niggli. Some of Miss Niggli's short stories were combined and produced as a motion picture, *Sombrero*. Outdoor historical plays, inspired by Koch and written by Paul Green and Kermit Hunter, were produced and published."

"Koch used the term 'folk play' in the sense of the German 'volk' (common people), thus describing his employment of the word: "The term 'folk,' as we use it, has nothing to do with the folk play of medieval times. But rather is it concerned with folk subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. For the most part they are realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic." The early plays of Eugene O'Neill and Paul Green, Koch regarded as folk plays; the dramas of such writers as Bernard Shaw and John Von Druten were not."

Scope and Contents

The Carolina Playmakers collection of playbills and programs consists of about 350 items documenting the theatrical activities organized or promoted by the Playmakers, Frederick H. Koch, and, more generally, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, between 1918 and 1953.

The material has been divided in two separate series. Series I consists of playbills, programs, and promotional material connected to the theatrical seasons of the Carolina Playmakers. Notable activities include productions of original folk plays written by the members of the company, including Paul Green, Loretto Carroll Bailey, Gertrude Coffin, Thomas Wolfe, Eugenia Rawls, and Josefina Niggli. Many of these productions were also presented by the Playmakers during extensive national tours, many of which are documented in the series by brochures and programs. The series also contains materials relating to productions of classic and contemporary works by authors such as William Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Oscar Wilde, Ellen Wood, William Schwenck Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, Henrik Ibsen, Noel Coward, Eugene O'Neill, George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Miller, and Bertolt Brecht, among others. Finally, the series comprises invitations, promotional materials, and newsletters distributed by the company. As a whole, this material provides researchers an overview of the many theatrical activities promoted by the Carolina Playmakers in its first decades.

Series II comprises material concerning the cultural initiatives organized by the University of North Carolina, along with other programs, playbills, and brochures relating to events and activities involving the Carolina Playmakers or their founder, Frederick H. Koch. Included in the series are the programs of

the meetings, festivals, and contests organized by the Carolina Dramatic Association, an organization created by the Carolina Playmakers and the University Extension Department's Bureau of Community Drama to promote the study and practice of theater in North Carolina schools and communities. The series also contains a small number of playbills and programs of special performances promoted by several departments and organizations affiliated with the University of North Carolina, such as the Department of German, the Department of Romance Languages, and the Student Entertainment Committee. A separate folder contains programs and brochures relating to special performances organized by the Carolina Playmakers, as well as productions of new plays written by Frederick Koch's students during the special courses he taught at the University of Colorado, the City University of New York, and the Banff School of Fine Arts. Another folder includes the programs of two successful outdoor dramas by Paul Green, *The Lost Colony* (productions of 1937, 1939, and 1941), and *The Highland Call* (presented in 1939 as part of a larger festival titled "The Highlanders: 1739-1939"). This series allows researchers to consider the institutional context in which the Carolina Playmakers operated, and offers insight on similar experiences inspired or directly organized by Koch and the Playmakers at other universities.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2017 October 4

Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

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Source of Acquisition

The items in the collection were acquired between 1925 and 1953 as a series of separate gifts from Frederick H. Koch and the Carolina Playmakers.

Processing Information note

Formerly Dewey 812H C227.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill:

Frederick H. Koch papers, 1893-1979

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Dept. of Dramatic Art photographs and related materials, 1911-1970s

Records of the Dept. of Dramatic Art, 1922-2016.

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Carolina Dramatic Association.
- Carolina Playmakers.
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Department of Dramatic Art.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Brochures
- Playbills
- Theater programs

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Koch, Frederick H. (Frederick Henry), 1877-1944

SUBJECT(S)

- Performing arts
- Playwriting
- Theater
- Theater--History--20th century

Collection Inventory

I. CAROLINA PLAYMAKERS' ACTIVITIES, 1918-1937, 1939-1953.

	Box	Folder
1918-1919 season, 1918-1919.	1	1
1919-1920 season, 1919-1920.	1	2
1920-1921 season, 1920-1921.	1	3
1921-1922 season, 1921-1922.	1	4
1922-1923 season, 1922-1923.	1	5
1923-1924 season, 1923-1924.	1	6
1924-1925 season, 1924-1925.	1	7
1925-1926 season, 1925-1926.	1	8
1927-1928 season, 1927-1928.	1	9
1928-1929 season, 1928-1929.	1	10
1929-1930 season, 1929-1930.	1	11
1930-1931 season, 1930-1931.	1	12
	Box	Folder
1930-1931 season, 1930-1931.	108	1

	Box	Folder
1931-1932 season, 1931-1932.	1	13
1932-1933 season, 1932-1933.	1	14
1933-1934 season, 1933-1934.	2	1
	Box	Folder
1933-1934 season, 1933-1934.	108	1
	Box	Folder
1934-1935 season, 1934-1935.	2	2
1935-1936 season, 1935-1936.	2	3
1936-1937 season, 1936-1937.	2	4
1939-1940 and 1940-1941 seasons, 1939-1941.	2	5
1941-1942 season, 1941-1942.	2	6
1942-1943 season, 1942-1943.	2	7
	Box	Folder
1942-1943 season, 1942-1943.	108	2
	Box	Folder
1943-1944 season, 1943-1944.	2	8
	Box	Folder
1943-1944 season, 1943-1944.	108	2
	Box	Folder
1944-1945 season, 1944-1945.	2	9
1946-1947 season, 1946-1947.	2	10

1952-1953 and 1953-1954 seasons, 1952-1953.	2	11
Undated theatrical season, undated.	2	12
Newsletters and announcements, circa 1942, 1944.	4	1
Promotional material and invitations, 1941-1943, undated.	3	1

II. OTHER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS.

	Box	Folder
Events and theatrical activities organized or sponsored by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1924-1936.	3	2
Events and theatrical activities organized or sponsored by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1937-1944, undated.	3	3
Events and activities organized by or with the participation of the Carolina Playmakers or Frederick Henry Koch, 1933-1943, undated.	3	4
Program of <i>The Lost Colony</i> , by Paul Green, performed in occasion of the "350th anniversary celebration of the beginning of Anglo-American civilization", 1937.	4	2
Program of <i>The Lost Colony</i> , by Paul Green, performed in occasion of the "352th anniversary celebration of the beginning of Anglo-American civilization", 1939.	4	2
Program of <i>The Lost Colony</i> , by Paul Green, performed in occasion of the "354th anniversary celebration of the beginning of Anglo-American civilization", 1941.	4	2

The Highlanders, 1739-1939, "Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Scottish Highlanders in the Valley of the Cape Fear," event program, 1939.

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