

Richard Wilson McCredy scrapbook of Philadelphia and New York City playbills

Ms. Coll. 1322

Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

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

September 7, 2017

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	McCredy, Richard Wilson, 1854-1924
Title	Richard Wilson McCredy scrapbook of Philadelphia and New York City playbills
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1322
Date [bulk]	1869-1905
Date [inclusive]	1869-1906
Extent	0.2 linear foot (1 volume)
Language	English
Abstract	The son of Thomas McCredy and Emma Dolores Wilson, Richard Wilson McCredy (1854-1924) was an iron merchant and alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania (Class of 1874). A gift by McCredy, this scrapbook consists of a collection of about 750 playbills and programs from Philadelphia and New York City, arranged in chronological order and pasted onto a volume of more than 200 pages.

Cite as:

Richard Wilson McCredy scrapbook of Philadelphia and New York City playbills, 1869-1906, MS. Coll. 1322, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of

Pennsylvania

Biography/History

The son of Thomas McCredy (1826-1856), and Emma Dolores Wilson (1826-1911), Richard Wilson McCredy (1854-1924) was an iron merchant and alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania (Class of 1874). Born in Philadelphia, McCredy lived in the city for most of his life, residing in the Rittenhouse Square area. He enrolled as a student in the Arts department in 1870, but did not complete his degree and left college at the end of his freshman year, in 1871. Over the the following decades, however, he remained involved with many organizations connected with the University of Pennsylvania including the Delta Sigma fraternity (Delta chapter), for which he served as secretary. In the 1890s, he was a board member of the Penn Athletic Association, and was affiliated with the University Barge and Corinthians Yacht Clubs. He married Frances Hart Ruckman (b. 1868) on January 16, 1909. The couple had no children, and divided their time between their residence in Philadelphia and their summer home in Cape May, New Jersey. Richard Wilson and Frances Ruckman McCredy are buried in the Doylestown Cemetery (Doylestown, Pennsylvania).

McCredy donated this scrapbook to Penn in March 1917. It includes a collection of playbills dated from 1869 to 1905, and mostly from Philadelphia and New York City. The authorship of the volume is uncertain. However, a comparison between the handwritten notes in the scrapbook and the hand who filled out McCredy's alumnus form – currently held by the University of Pennsylvania Records Center, and possibly compiled by McCredy himself – shows some similarities, and indicates that McCredy may have assembled the volume himself.

Scope and Contents

This scrapbook of playbills consists of a collection of about 750 playbills and programs from Philadelphia and New York City, pasted into or laid in a volume of more than 200 unnumbered pages. The playbills are mostly arranged in chronological order, from 1869 to 1905, although a small number of loose playbills are enclosed as single documents in a pocket created between two pages at the end of the volume. Given the extensive range of theatrical genres documented by the playbills, and the consistency in which this material is presented, the scrapbook works as a useful resource to better understand the evolution of the theatrical scene of two important cultural centers on the East Coast.

The repertoire covered by the playbills includes almost every form of theatrical entertainment—comedies, Shakespeare plays, melodramas, vaudeville shows, tragedies, opera bouffe, operetta, French, Italian, and German opera, dime theaters, amateur performances, minstrel shows, and early cinema. However, the majority of playbills is devoted to comedy, operettas, and opera bouffe, and features some among the

most celebrated artists of the time: Lydia Thompson, John Sleeper Clarke, Frank Maguire Mayo, Marie Aimée, Edward Askew Sothern, Joseph Jefferson, Joseph K. Emmett, and Lotta Crabtree. Other prominent personalities mentioned in the playbills include, among others, actors Henry Irving, Louisa Lane Drew, Robert Bruce Mantell, Helena Modjeska, Richard Mansfield, Julia Marlowe, Ellen Terry, Sarah Bernhardt, Clara Morris, Olga Nethersole, Maurice Barrymore, Caroline Louise Dudley (Mrs. Leslie Carter), Ada Rehan, Fanny Janauschek, Edward Loomis Davenport, Fanny Davenport, Tommaso Salvini, Lillie Langtry, and Minnie Maddern Fiske, and singers Christina Nilsson, Italo Campanini, Luigi Ravelli, Adelina Patti, Nellie Melba, Sofia Scalchi, Emma Calvé, Lillian Nordica, Emma Earnes, Marcella Sembrich, Emilio De Marchi, and Johanna Gadschi.

The wide number of institutions represented in the volume testifies of the thriving theatrical life of Philadelphia and New York City in those decades. The list of Philadelphia theaters includes the Arch Street Theatre, the Chestnut Street Theatre, the Walnut Street Theatre, Fox's American Theatre (later known as Central Theatre and Grand Central Variety Theatre), the Seventh Street Theatre, the Academy of Music, the Arch Street Opera House, the Eleventh Street Opera House, the Horticultural Hall, the New National Theatre (later named Mortimer's Varieties), the New Philadelphia Varieties, the Broad Street Theatre (later known as Lyceum Theatre, Haverly's Theatre, and McCaull Opera House), the Haydn and Handel Hall, the Alhambra Theatre, the North Broad Street Theatre, the International Comique, the Temple Theatre, B. F. Keith's Bijou Theatre, the Girard Avenue Theatre, the Garrick Theatre, the Arcade Garden, Dougherty's Alhambra Palace, the Olympic Theatre, the Grand Sultan Divan, and Enoch's Varieties. The scrapbooks also contains a smaller number of playbills from theaters in New York City, such as the Metropolitan Opera House, Booth's Theatre, Wallack's Theatre, Daly's Theatre, Union Square Theatre, The Casino, and Belasco Theatre. A few dime museum playbills (especially the New American Museum and Menagerie on the northwest corner of Arch and 9th Street, later also known as Simpson's Museum and Menagerie, and as Philadelphia Museum) can also be found in the volume, providing precious information on this form of popular entertainment from the late 1800s. Another playbill from 1897 announces an early exhibition of Lumière's cinematograph at the B. F. Keith's Bijou Theatre, the first Philadelphia theater to show motion pictures. Finally, the scrapbooks contains programs and playbills of amateur performances organized by the Mask and Wig Club, and by other associations affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania.

Administrative Information

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

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Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

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Source of Acquisition

Gift of Richard Wilson McCredy, March 20, 1917

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Academy of Music (Philadelphia, Pa.).
- Arch Street Theatre (Philadelphia, Pa.).
- Chestnut Street Theatre (Philadelphia, Pa.)
- Mask and Wig Club.
- Walnut Street Theatre (Philadelphia, Pa.)

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Scrapbooks
- Theater programs

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)--Social life and customs

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- McCredy, Richard Wilson, 1854-1924

SUBJECT(S)

- Minstrel shows
- Opera
- Performing arts
- Playbills
- Theater
- Theater--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia--19th century
- Theater--United States

Collection Inventory

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