

Clyde Fitch typescripts and letters

Ms. Coll. 1332

Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

Last updated on May 13, 2019.

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

2018 February 13

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Fitch, Clyde, 1865-1909
Title	Clyde Fitch typescripts and letters
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1332
Date	circa 1890-1925
Extent	1 linear foot (2 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	William Clyde Fitch (better known as Clyde Fitch, 1865-1909) is considered one of the most successful American playwrights of his time, and the first to be produced abroad on a regular basis. This collection consists of typescripts of ten unpublished plays and four autograph letters written by Fitch.

Cite as:

Clyde Fitch typescripts and letters, circa 1890-1925, MS. Coll. 1332, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

"W. Clyde Fitch (AC 1886) was a prolific and highly successful American playwright best known for plays of social satire and character study. Notable for having four of his plays running concurrently on Broadway, he went on to write and produce, in a twenty-year period, thirty-six original plays, twenty-one adaptations, and five dramatizations of novels. His name alone was enough to draw large audiences, and his works were produced throughout the United States and in Europe as well. He was the first American dramatist to be regularly produced abroad. The critic and scholar William Lyon Phelps wrote in 1921, "when [Fitch] began to write, American drama scarcely existed; when he died it was reality.... He did more for American drama than any other man in our history.""

"William Clyde Fitch was born in Elmira, New York on May 2, 1865. He spent part of his childhood in Schenectady, New York, and attended the Holderness School, Plymouth, New Hampshire, before attending Amherst College. At Amherst he was known among his classmates as "Billy" (after his given name William, which he later dropped) and was active in dramatic productions; his literary publications in college were mainly verse, including his Grove Oration speech in 1886. His first successful play, *Beau Brummel* (1890), was written especially for the actor Richard Mansfield. Subsequent plays of that period were largely melodramas and historical works that were less successful than his comedies of the early 1900s, including *The Climbers* (1901), *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* (1901), *The Girl with the Green Eyes* (1902), *The Truth* (1907) and *The City* (1909). However, the popularity of his works on the stage barely exceeded his own lifetime."

"Fitch was an avid collector of books, antiques and art, with which he filled his home at 113 East 40th St., New York City (a residence that, for a time, was one of New York's most famous salons), as well as at his other homes at Katonah, New York; and Greenwich, Connecticut. The "Clyde Fitch Memorial Room" in Converse Hall at Amherst College was a gift to the College from Fitch's mother. It contained many of the furnishings and most of the books that were in his study in New York City."

"Clyde Fitch died on September 4, 1909, one week after an operation for appendicitis in Châlons-sur-Marne, France, at age 44." **The information above was excerpted from the finding aid of the W. Clyde Fitch collection, 1867-1986 (bulk: 1883-1909), held by the Amherst College and Special Collections.**

As a homosexual playwright, Fitch has known a rediscovery since the 1990s, especially within the growing field of gender studies. Fitch's brief relationship with Oscar Wilde in the late 1880s and early 90s has been extensively discussed, as well as the influence of Fitch's sexual identity on his own work. In 2014, the Queer Resource Center and the Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College organized an event dedicated to Fitch, titled "Clyde Pride: Queering the Amherst Archives." A new Fitch biography (*Clyde Fitch and the American Theatre: An Olive in the Cocktail*, Lanham, MD: Farleigh Dickinson University Press) (University of Pennsylvania copy) was authored by Kevin Lane Dearing and published in 2016.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of ten unpublished typescript plays and four autograph letters written by Clyde Fitch.

The material has been divided in two series. Series I includes the typescripts of ten plays written by Fitch. Although they were never published, all of the plays were produced between 1890 and 1908. This material is arranged in alphabetical order by title of the play. The typescripts themselves are undated, although they were probably created between the production date of the respective play and Fitch's death

in 1909. The plays are all bound, with the exception of one copy of "The Toast of the Town" (first produced in 1905) which is unbound. The typescripts in the collection are in most cases unique copies, although different manuscript versions of the same plays are also available at other research centers such as the Amherst College Library and the New York Public Library. Because of this, the materials in this series offer researchers a privileged perspective on the genesis of a large portion of Fitch's output as a playwright.

Series II consists of four autograph letters written by Fitch. The first three (respectively written in 1891, 1895, and 1897) are arranged in chronological order. A fourth undated letter was pasted onto a leaflet also including two portraits of Clyde Fitch excerpted from contemporary publications.

Administrative Information

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

2018 February 13

Finding aid prepared by Siel Agugliaro.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

Copyright restrictions may exist. For most library holdings, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania do not hold copyright. It is the responsibility of the requester to seek permission from the holder of the copyright to reproduce material from the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Source of Acquisition

The material in the collection was acquired between 1925 and 1926 through a series of purchases via the Morris L. Clothier Fund, the Benjamin Franklin Library Fund, the 1894 College Memorial Fund, and the Society of Alumni (College) Fund. An additional typescript was donated in 1929.

Arthur H. Quinn (1875-1960), an English professor who was in charge of the Clothier Collection of American Drama of the University of Pennsylvania, described the acquisition process of the Clyde Fitch manuscripts in a survey of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries published in 1940:

"I obtained a number of manuscripts of Clyde Fitch in an amusing, if irritating way. Miss Elizabeth Marbury, the vice president of the American Play Company, had made an appointment with me to discuss the copying of certain of Fitch's plays for which she had been the agent. When I called on her in New York, she refused to help me in any way, although she knew the purpose of my visit, and directed me rather rudely to 'see Mr. Rumsey' if I wanted anything. By accident I turned in the wrong direction after leaving the office, in order to find the Mr. Rumsey to whom she had referred me. I went instead to the office of another Mr. Rumsey in the American Play Company, who took the greatest interest in our problems, and not only furnished me with manuscripts of Clyde Fitch, but permitted me to copy other

manuscripts, such as those of Mark Twain... Among the Fitch manuscripts are *Frédéric Lemaître*, *Bohemia*, *Girls*, *The happy Marriage*, and others."

The above passage is excerpted from *A Faculty Survey of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 124.

Processing Information note

Formerly Dewey 812.F553Bo, 812.F553F, 812.F553Gi, 812.F553Gl, 812.F553H, 812.F553Ha, 812.F553M, 812.F553Soc, 812.F553To, 812.F5531W, and f812.F553.2.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At the Amherst College Library:

W. Clyde Fitch Collection, 1867-1986 (bulk: 1883-1909), MA.00116

At the Bates College Library:

Clyde Fitch papers, ca. 1880-1909, MC015

At the New York Public Library:

Clyde Fitch papers, 1887-1904, MssCol 1014

At the University of Virginia Library:

Papers of Clyde Fitch 1890-1908

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Plays (performed works)
- Typescripts

SUBJECT(S)

- Authors
- Authors, American--19th century
- Authors, American--20th century
- Male homosexuality
- Performing arts
- Playwriting
- Theater--United States

Collection Inventory

I. TYPESCRIPTS OF PLAYS, CIRCA 1890-1925.

	Box	Folder
"Bohemia: A Play in a Prologue and Four Acts, by Clyde Fitch. The author is indebted to the French of Henri Murger and Theodore Barriere for most of the material made use of in the play", circa 1896.	1	1
"Frederic Lemaitre: A Comedy in One Act, by Clyde Fitch, Esq.", circa 1890.	1	2
"Girls: a Farcical Comedy in Three Acts By Clyde Fitch", circa 1908.	1	3
"Glad of It! A Comedy in Four Acts By Clude Fitch", circa 1903.	1	4
"The Happy Marriage: A New Comedy by Clyde Fitch", circa 1909.	1	5
"Her Sister: A Comedy in Three Acts by Clyde Fitch and Cosmo Gordon Lennox", circa 1907.	1	6
"A Modern Match: A new Play in Three Acts and An Epilogue by Clyde Fitch", circa 1892.	2	1
"The Social Swim: A Play in Four Acts by Clyde Fitch. Based on the French of Victorien Sardou", circa 1893.	2	2
"The Toast of the Town", copy I, circa 1905.	2	3
"The Toast of the Town", copy II, circa 1895.	2	4
"Wolfville: A Drama of the South West. By Clyde Fitch & Willis Steell	2	5

(From Alfred Henry Lewis's book of the same name)", circa 1905.

II. LETTERS FROM CLYDE FITCH.

	Box	Folder
Letter to "Mr. Corey" from New York City, on Players Club letterhead, 1891 April 22.	2	6
Letter to "Dear Stone" from Dorking, Surrey, England, 1895 August 3.	2	6
Letter to "Dear Sir" from 154 West 57th Street, New York City, probably 1897 March 3.	2	6
Letter to "Mr. Taggart" from Hotel Brighton, Atlantic City, with two portraits of Clyde Fitch, undated.	2	6
List of letters and information on their acquisition, circa 1925.	2	6