

Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia records

Ms. Coll. 496

Finding aid prepared by Cory Austin Knudson.

Last updated on July 14, 2020.

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

2019 December 5

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Title	Shakspere Society of Philadelphia records
Call number	Ms. Coll. 496
Date [inclusive]	1851-2000
Extent	3.5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	The minutes, correspondence, publications, programs, article clippings, and limited ephemera collected in these records relate to the history, structure, and day-to-day operations of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia, the oldest continuously operating Shakespeare society in the United States, during the period of 1851-1995.

Cite as:

Shakspere Society of Philadelphia records, 1851-2000, Ms. Coll. 496, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia was founded as the "Shakspere Apostles" in October, 1851 by Asa I. Fish, Garrick Mallery Jr., Furman Sheppard, and Samuel C. Perkins, all Philadelphia-area attorneys who sought in the discussion of the works of William Shakespeare a respite from the stresses of lawyerly life. Mallery, the Apostles' first secretary, records that the group's discussions began to become more official in 1852, when the Shakspere Apostles began to meet at the office of Fish at the Mercantile Library on a weekly basis (see Box 1 "The Origin and Early Years of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia," p. 5). These meetings would be followed by what Mallery terms "post-lecturean exercises, consisting of a glass of ale at a hostel unknown to fame, and since decayed, situate on Tenth Street above Chestnut, with the additional refection of the casual cracker and the exiguous cheese." Over the next decade, the group would grow from four to over 25 members. "The growth of our body," writes Mallery, "made imperative the choice of a leader, or at least of a presiding officer, and of some rudimentary organization to assist him"--as such, the group established a governing structure, bylaws, a constitution, and adopted the name of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia in 1861. For over the next century and a half, the Society would choose a specific play each year and hold regular meetings over the course of the winter, each consisting of a period of discussion followed by a period of "post-lecturean exercises," which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had come to feature much finer fare than that "casual cracker and ... exiguous cheese" described by Mallery. (Weekly menus interspersed throughout these records will give the researcher a sense of how rich--in more senses than one--the regular dining habits of the Society were.)

From its founding, the Shakspere Society functioned both as a scholarly and a social endeavor. These respective poles vacillated in relative importance over the decades, following the character of its membership as well as "politics and national mood," according to Matthew Kozusko ("The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia," *Borrowers and Lenders* II, no. [2006]). A period of unprecedentedly incisive scholarship that is of particular interest began in the early 1860s, when Horace Howard Furness became secretary of the Society. Furness, a lawyer whose worsening hearing impairment made the practice of his profession at first difficult and eventually impossible, found refuge in the study of Shakespeare and the meetings of the Shakspere Society. Furness pushed the group's members to analyze and discuss their texts with a depth and rigor the group had never attempted. One result of this scholarly fervor is a line-by-line exegesis on *The Tempest* based on the minutes of their 1864-1865 season, published in 1866 as *Notes of Studies on The Tempest : Minutes of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia for 1864-65* (Box 10, Folder 10). Another, more groundbreaking result of this period and the "chief pride" of the Society, according to its early-twentieth-century secretary Henry N. Paul, "is the part which it had in introducing Dr. Horace Howard Furness to his life work" ("Shakespeare in Philadelphia," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 76, no. 6 [1936]: 725). Specifically, Paul is claiming--perhaps a bit grandly, though justifiably--that Furness's work with the Shakspere Society led him to the creation of the *New Variorum Shakespeare*, the monumental impact of which is detailed in *The Philadelphia Shakespeare Story: Horace Howard Furness and the Variorum Shakespeare* by James M. Gibson (New York: AMS Press, 1990).

Taken over in the twentieth century by Furness's son, who would also serve as secretary for the Shakspere Society, the "Furness Variorum" indeed remains the "chief pride" of a society whose members would include scholars as well as artists, politicians, and socialites. Its exclusivity is not entirely without some antiquarian (or rather, even in retrospect, genuinely antique) prejudices--as Kozusko wrote in 2006, the Society "stands today as a rare instance of a nineteenth-century belletristic literary society that has survived largely unchanged from its origin in both form and practice. Membership, by invitation only, is no longer restricted to men, and while new members are inducted without regard to 'occupation or calling,' some amount of academic or social affluence remains a functional prerequisite." Continuing into the twenty-first century, the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia is the oldest continuously operating Shakespeare society in the United States.

The minutes and other documents--including correspondence, publications, programs, article clippings,

and some limited ephemera--collected in these records provide firsthand accounts and documentary resources for researchers investigating the history, structure, and internal workings of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia specifically during the period of 1851 to 2000. Those studying specific figures belonging to the Society--in particular the individuals who served as secretary--will also be interested in this collection. (A complete list of the Shakspere Society's secretaries can be found in Henry L. Savage, "The Shakespeare Society of Philadelphia," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 3, no. 4 [October 1952]: 345-6.) Those researching the history of Shakespeare's reception in the United States or literary clubs generally will also be interested in this collection.

Scope and Contents

This collection documents the operation and activities of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia from its founding in 1851 to 2000, and is divided into three series: I. Records of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia secretaries; II. Publications, miscellaneous materials related to Shakspere Society of Philadelphia and its members, memorials, retrospective booklets, and correspondence; and III. Programs. The bulk of this collection can be found in Series I. Records of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia secretaries and includes primarily the minutes from the meetings of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia that took place between 1851 and 2000, as recorded by the Shakspere Society's secretaries. The Society's official secretaries and a great many secretaries pro-tempore and other members of the Shakspere Society appear throughout the records. The minutes are often written in a wry and gently self-deprecating style, with secretaries self-consciously playing with the line between the seriousness of the Society and the campy performance of highbrow stuffiness. In both the minute books (contained in boxes 1-6) and the unbound minutes (contained in boxes 7-10 and box 12, folders 5-6), various documents, clippings, correspondence, booklets, photographs, and printed ephemera are interfoliated with the actual records of the proceedings of the Shakspere Society's meetings.

Researchers, therefore, should not presume that series II. Publications, miscellaneous materials related to the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia and its members, memorials, retrospective booklets, and correspondence contains absolutely all of these materials that are actually present in this collection. Instead, there is likely significant overlap between the first two series. Series II additionally contains booklets officially published on behalf of the Society, memorial information and speeches dedicated to former members Francis Randolph Packard and Henry Neill Paul, lists of members and the years in which certain plays were read, and significant portions of *Studies on The Tempest*, among other Society-related materials.

Series III. Programs contains programs for the annual dinners of the Shakspere Society between 1860 and 1973. Each program contains a list of members and a bill of fare interspersed with numerous quotations from the year's play. The quotations are often humorous in context--e.g., in the program for the Shakspere Society's fifty-sixth annual dinner (Box 12 Folder 1), under "Members Absent," the quotations "You are idle shallow things," "I would not be in some of your coats for two pence," and "fit for the mountains and barbarous caves" appear.

Administrative Information

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

2019 December 5

Finding aid prepared by Cory Austin Knudson.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Gifts of the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia, 1995 and 2019.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At the University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts:
H. H. Furness Memorial Library manuscript collection, 1575-1991 (bulk: 1812-1930), Ms. Coll. 1356
James M. Gibson research collection on Horace Howard Furness, 1882-1985 (bulk: 1975-1985), Ms. Coll. 1331

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Minute books
- Minutes (Records)
- Notes
- Plays (performed works)
- Programs

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Dana, Charles E.
- Dana, Charles Edmund, 1843-1914
- De Witt Culyer, Thomas
- Dickson, Arthur G.
- Furness, Horace Howard, 1833-1912
- Furness, Horace Howard, 1865-1930
- Garrick, Mallery, Jr., 1831-1894
- Hopkinson, James P.
- Keep, Henry B.
- Mallery, Garrick, 1831-1894
- Paul, Theodore S.
- Ravinus, F. Markoe
- Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616
- Smyth, Carroll
- Washington, William Herbert

SUBJECT(S)

- Clubs
- Drama--History and criticism
- Dramatic criticism
- Literature--Societies, etc.

Collection Inventory

I. RECORDS OF THE SHAKSPERE SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA SECRETARIES, 1851-1995.

	Box	Folder
1851-1862.	1	
1863-1877.	2	
1877-1898.	3	
1898-1912.	4	
1913-1932.	5	
1932-1941.	6	
1941-1944.	7	1
1945-1959.	7	2
1960-1963.	7	3
1964.	7	4
1964-1965.	7	5
1966.	7	6
1967.	7	7
1968.	7	8

1969.	7	9
1970.	7	10
1971.	8	1
1972.	8	2
1973.	8	3
1974.	8	4
1975.	8	5
1976.	8	6
1977.	8	7
1978.	8	8
1979.	8	9
1980.	8	10
1981.	9	1
1982.	9	2
1983.	9	3
1984.	9	4
1985.	9	5
1986.	9	6
1987.	9	7

1988.	10	1
	Box	Folder
1988.	106	1
	Box	Folder
1989.	10	2
1990.	10	3
1991.	10	4
1992.	10	5
1992.	12	5
1993.	10	6
1993.	12	5
1994.	12	5
1994.	10	7
	Box	Folder
1994.	106	1
	Box	Folder
1995.	10	8
1995.	12	5
1996-2000 April.	12	6

II. PUBLICATIONS, MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS RELATED TO SHAKSPERE SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA AND ITS MEMBERS, MEMORIALS, RETROSPECTIVE BOOKLETS, AND CORRESPONDENCE, 1860-1955.

	Box	Folder
Publications: <i>The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia</i> , 1860.	10	9
Publications: <i>Some Remarks on Mr. W. Edwards' "Shaksper Not Shakespeare"</i> by R.L. Ashhurst, Vice-Dean, 1901 January 23.	10	9
Publications: <i>Hamlet's Feigned Madness and Dr. Furness' Comment</i> by Robert R. Benedict, 1920 March 24.	10	9
Publications: <i>William Shakespeare: Gentleman</i> by James M. Beck, 1926 April 23.	10	9
Publications: <i>The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia: List of Members from the Foundation 1851</i> , 1949 April 23.	10	9
Clippings from <i>Notes of Studies on The Tempest : Minutes of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia for 1864-65</i> , 1866.	10	10
Miscellaneous records, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and ephemera pertaining to Shakspere Society of Philadelphia and its members, 1913-1951.	10	11
	Box	Folder
Miscellaneous records, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and ephemera pertaining to Shakspere Society of Philadelphia and its members, 1913-1951.	106	1
	Box	Folder
"Francis Randolph Packard (An Appreciation)," memorial invitations, and <i>1872-1897: Memorial of the Philadelphia Shakespeare Society</i> , 1897-1913.	11	1
Henry Neill Paul memorial booklet, 1955 March 2.	11	2

Retrospective booklets, 1912-1916.	11	3
Invitations, 1949-1960.	11	4
Miscellaneous correspondence, 1927-1960.	11	5

III. PROGRAMS, 1860-1973.

	Box	Folder
1860-1880.	11	6
1881-1899.	11	7
1900-1907.	11	8
1908-1914.	12	1
1915-1929.	12	2
1947-1957.	12	3
1958-1973.	12	4