

THEATRE HISTORY OF KING COUNTY

Historical Paper No.17



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98104-2672, (206) 296-8688, 1-800-325-6165, www.4culture.org

Introduction

The information given below is a preliminary listing of resources relating to Theatre history in Seattle and King County. Papers in this series are maintained in electronic format. They are revised and updated periodically as new information becomes available.

PUBLICATIONS & DOCUMENTS

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Cone, Molly, Howard Droker and Jacqueline Williams, "Art, Music and Theater in the Early Years," in *Family of Strangers: Building A Jewish Community in Washington State*, 2003, Seattle Washington State Jewish Historical Society in cooperation with University of Washington Press.

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-----, *The Dream and the Deed: A Stage Cavalcade of Seattle's Hundred Years*, the official play of the Seattle Centennial sponsored by Greater Seattle, Inc., 1952, University of Washington School of Drama.

Kane, Karen, "The Showboat: Endangered Tradition," *Landmarks*, Vol. IV Nos. 1-2, pp. 14-6.

Ladd, James William, *Survey of the Legitimate Theatre in Seattle Since 1856*, unpublished master of arts thesis, 1935, Pullman, State College of Washington.

Lincoln, Fred, "Vaudeville in Washington," *Washington Magazine*. Vol. 2, September, 1906, p. 29-30.

Mahmoud, Salem, *Organizational Survival in the Performing Arts: The Making of Seattle Opera*, 1976, New York, Praeger Publishing.

McDonald, Lucile, "Repertory Theater Had Solid Niche in Bellevue," *Journal American*, October 5, 1986, reprinted in *Lucile McDonald's Eastside Notebook: 101 Local History Vignettes*, ed. Lorraine McConaghy, 1993, Redmond, Marymoor Museum.

Morgan, Murray, "John Considine and the Box Houses, 1893-1910," chap. III in *Skid Road: An Informal Portrait of Seattle*, rev. ed., 1978. Sausalito, Comstock Editions.

Myers, Dorothy Rae Schneiderman, *The Seattle Repertory Playhouse Manuscripts Collection, 1928-1950*, 1961, Seattle, Master of Library Science Project, University of Washington.

Nelson, Edwin Leonard, *The History of Road Shows in Seattle from Their Beginnings to 1914*, unpublished master of arts thesis, 1947, Seattle, University of Washington.

Ottenheimer, Albert M., *The Washington State Theater*, 1936, Seattle, by the Theater.

Rohrer, Mary Katherine, *The History of Seattle Stock Companies: From the Beginning to 1934*, 1945 University of Washington Press.

Saloutos, Theodore, "Alexander Pantages, Theater Magnate of the West," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 57 No. 4, October 1966, pp. 137-147.

Sitton, Robert M., *Evergreen Stages: A History of Theater in Portland and Seattle*, 1987, typescript, University of Washington Library.

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Tarrach, Dean Arthur, *Alexander Pantages: The Seattle Pantages and His Vaudeville Circuit*, unpublished master of arts thesis, 1973, Seattle, University of Washington.

Vaughn, Stuart, *A Possible Theater: The Experiences of a Pioneer Director in American Resident Theatre*, 1969, N.Y., McGraw Hill Book Company.

Walker, Phillip N., *A History of Dramatics at the University of Washington from the Beginning to June 1919*, unpublished master of arts thesis, University of Washington, 1947.

Welch, Bob, "Intiman Theatre Got Cozy Start in Kirkland," *Journal American*, June 7, 1985.

West, Ronald Oakley, *Left Out: The Seattle Repertory Playhouse, Audience Description and the Problem of Leftist Theater During the Depression Era*, 1993, Seattle, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington.

FEDERAL THEATER

Federal Theater operated out of facilities in Seattle, but also apparently brought a road show to outlying areas. Federal Theater was controversial, and was shut down by the U.S. Congress in 1939. It became a focus of the notorious "un-American activities" investigations by the Washington State Legislature in 1948, with the onset of the Cold War.

Flanagan, Hallie, *Arena*, 1940, N.Y. Duell, Sloan and Pearce, reprinted 1985, N.Y., Limelight Editions. This is a first-hand, definitive overview of Federal Theater at the national level by the person who masterminded the project and directed it from beginning to end. It contains a brief but informative section on Federal Theater in Washington State, and the production record given at the end of the book shows that many productions were originated in Seattle, Tacoma and the Pacific Northwest.

Hewitt, Gloria, *A History of the Washington State Theater, 1931-1941*, unpublished master of arts thesis, 1964, Seattle, University of Washington.

Johnson, Evamarii A., *A Production History of the Seattle Federal Theater Project's Negro Repertory Company: 1935-1939*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1981, Seattle, University of Washington.

Monograph on the Noh Stage of Japan. Works Progress Administration Federal Theater Project, 1937, Seattle. Sponsored by the Drama Division University of Washington. UW

Monograph of the Stage, The Passion Play of Valenciennes, WPA Federal Theater Project 813-1, 1936, Seattle. Sponsored by the Drama Division, University of Washington. UW

Priestley, Marilyn, Compiler, *Comprehensive Guide to the Manuscripts Collection and to the Personal Papers in the University Archives*, 1980, Seattle, University of Washington Libraries. The guide lists a number of collections of papers of interest to the history of WPA, including the Federal Theater Project. Of value are the papers of: Florence Bean James, Bette Anderson, the

Seattle Repertory Playhouse, and the Washington State Theater. See also the *Seattle Repertory Playhouse Scrapbook* at UW Special Collections, Allen Library.

Rune, Ann, Compiler, *Oral History Index, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program 1974-1977*, October 1977, Olympia, Department of General Administration, Division of Archives and Records Management. The index includes summary information on interviews with several ethnic/minority groups. The African American interviews contain material about WPA. Those with Sarah Oliver Jackson, Betty Theresa Collins Shelman and Joseph T. Staton contain material on WPA/Federal Theater.

Stevedore. This play, produced in February, 1996 by Valerie Curtis-Newton at the University of Washington Playhouse, was a revival of a play staged in Seattle during the 1936 Dock Strike by the "Negro Unit" of the Federal Theater

Taylor, Quintard, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era*, 1994, Seattle, University of Washington Press. See chapter 5, pp. 150-3 for a discussion of the Negro Repertory Company of the WPA Federal Theater in Seattle.

Timber. This was a revival/adaptation of a Federal Theater presentation. In September-October of 1990, Seattle Public Theater presented *Timber, A Living Newspaper About Deforestation & Reforestation*, a work originally written for the Federal Theater Project by Burke Ormsby and Myrtle Mary Moss. It was adapted by Bryan Willis, with music and Lyrics by Edd Key. According to Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr.'s *Show Biz: From Vaude to Video* (N.Y., 1954), "No troupe of the Federal Theater Project aroused the bitter enmity of the Roosevelt-haters as did the Living Newspaper." The authors dismiss the allegations of communist infiltration of federal theater as anti-New Deal propaganda.

Un-American Activities in Washington State, First and Second Reports, 1948, Olympia, Report of the Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, Albert F. Canwell, Chairman. This astonishing, two-volume set of transcripts include allegations of subversive activities including those associated with Federal Theater at the Seattle Repertory Playhouse of the University of Washington. For an alternative view of the Committee, see Vern Countryman's *Un-American Activities in the State of Washington: The Work of the Canwell Committee* (Ithaca, 1951).

Williams, Guy, "Seattle's History Making Negro Theater," *Federal Theater*, 1936, Vol. 2 No.1, pp.7-9.

OTHER RESOURCES

Muir, Timothy John and Renee, "Lost Picture Show or Marquee de Sad" series of articles in *North Seattle Press* (on movie houses) 1993.

Among the local archival resources available on theatre history is the J. Willis Sayre Collection, a large and significant collection of photographic images of theatrical and vaudeville performers, musicians and entertainers who played in Seattle between 1900 and 1955. Information about the collection, including a searchable database of thousands of images is available at the university of Washington Libraries web site at <http://content.lib.washington.edu/sayrepublicweb/index.html> or <http://db.lib.washington.edu/sayre>

Additional resources at the University include theses, dissertations and the holdings of the Drama Department Library and the Manuscripts, Special Collection and University Archives collections at the Allen-Suzzallo facility of the University of Washington Libraries.

The Sayre-Carkeek collection at the Seattle Public Library and other holdings in Music and Arts collections include some primary resources for theater history. Information is available at www.spl.org via the search functions.

Landmark nominations (National Register, State, Seattle) of historic theaters, including Nippon Kan, Music Hall, Moore, Fifth Avenue, Eagles, Coliseum, Showboat, Admiral, etc. contain useful information and bibliographic sources.

The KCTS video “Northwest Saturday Night” provides some interesting background on local theatre and vaudeville history.

The late Marc Dempsey’s “Lost Theatres of Washington State” research files are located at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle. The materials he compiled were intended to provide the basis for a publication.

Laura Drake of Seattle has developed several projects relating to Seattle theatre and vaudeville history with partial support from King County Lodging Tax funding. Transcriptions of oral histories relating to her 1999 Heritage Special Projects oral history project are on file at the Heritage 4Culture Program.

The Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society has a web site with some historical features. Seattle is said to be the cradle of the theatre organ in the U.S. Visit the web site at <http://www.pstos.org>

A number of community and neighborhood histories for King County and Seattle contain information on local theatres. Even some of the smaller communities around the region had performing arts facilities at one time.

HistoryLink at www.historylink.org can be checked for some essays relating to theatre history.

<p>This information is available upon request in alternative formats for persons with disabilities. TTY Relay: 711.</p>

by Charles Payton
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