

Compiled by Emilia Garvey
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Provenance

The records of the Children's Theatre, Inc. of Champaign-Urbana, was donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library (TUFL) by a vote of the Children's Theatre Board on June 9, 2006. The records arrived in one installment at TUFL in December 2006.

Physical Description

4 boxes (2.0 linear ft.) + 1 oversized box.

Access

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

Historical Note

Children's Theatre, Inc. began as a committee of the University of Illinois chapter of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 1938. Members of the group hoped to cultivate children's appreciation for the performing art, an agenda that arose in response to movie culture, which was leading children "to crave the excitement and sensation offered by western 'thrillers' and other unsuitable dramatic productions." In order to provide worthwhile entertainment, the group coordinated productions by professional troupes as well as plays put on by local students and Children's Theater Committee members. In light of their early success, the Children's Theatre was able to establish itself as a not-for-profit corporation separate from AAUW in 1940.

From its founding, the group organized all aspects of its theatrical productions, with the exception of the performance itself. They selected and booked productions, publicized performances and sold tickets to children through the schools, provided educational materials related to each performance for school library and classroom use, ushered performances, and managed the funds generated from performances to put towards the next performance.

As they were affiliated with the University Women, the Children's Theatre usually booked University of Illinois locations for their productions. Many of their productions were staged at the University's major performance venue Foellinger Auditorium, moving to the University's new venue, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts when it opened in 1969. In the 1960s and 1970s, they also booked some productions at the Station Theatre in Urbana.

Group publicity took the form of ticket advertisement in newspapers and at local schools, as well as yearly feature articles in both the *Urbana Courier* and the *Champaign News-Gazette* and individual articles on smaller performances.

Ticket sales were by and large carried out in public schools, often organized in conjunction with the P.T.A. Students were responsible for purchasing their tickets, although donations were sometimes provided to purchase tickets for lower-income students.

During its first three decades, Children's Theatre Inc. took the lead in organizing performances, but with the University Theatre Department's move to Krannert Center, the Children's Theatre took on a more collaborative role. The productions they selected often showcased local playwrights, directors, and artists involved in University theatre including Shozo Sato, who produced Kabuki plays for the Children's Theatre, Roman Tymchyshyn and Karma Ibsen-Riley. Another effort was an added emphasis upon puppetry, which included providing puppet stages to libraries and schools, organizing summer puppetry workshops for children, and supporting the work of local puppeteer Ginger Lozar. The Children's Theatre celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1989 with a production of *Mother Hicks* attended by the playwright.

The Krannert Center began a Youth Series in 1982 which followed in the footsteps of the Children's Theatre and has continued to the present day. The Krannert Center books children's productions, brings school groups to the theatre, and provides "Stage Pages" with educational information and activities for each student. The Children's Theatre members moved into a largely supportive role with the advent of this program, ushering and promoting Krannert productions and providing some scholarships for student attendance.

The Children's Theatre Board voted to dissolve their corporation on June 20, 2006. They dispersed their remaining funds to the Susan Sargeant McDonald Fund for Youth Programming at Krannert Center.

Scope and Content

The Children's Theater Inc. was a sizeable and effective organization with a committed membership. The records that they have donated to the Archives reflect their continued hard work over many decades. Specifically, annual reports and nearly comprehensive board minutes track the progress and activities of the group on a monthly and annual basis. Financial statements, publicity committee reports, and PTA representatives files, though non-comprehensive, give a good picture of target audiences, attendance, and overall success of various performances. The correspondence within these records is mostly between members, but also includes routine mailings to schools and some communication with the Krannert Center administration.

For researchers interested in the basic structure and membership of the organization, the *Membership information* folder contains annual announcements of membership, committee placements, meeting locations and planned productions. The group's constitution and various member-written histories also serve as a good starting point to understand the group's goals and points of pride over the decades. News clipping photocopies and scrapbooks offer insight into the group as part of the larger community and into the character of individual performances.

The records of the Children's Theatre, Inc. are particularly strong in internal administrative records, and for the dates ranging from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Since this was a time of transition and reflection on the group's historical role, it is a rich period for information and for understanding the groups role over the larger span of their existence. Production and publications of the group are less complete, but give a snapshot of publicity and educational efforts for that time period as well.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into three series: Administrative records, Production and publication materials, and Scrapbooks. Materials span from the group's founding in 1938 to its dissolution in 2006, with particular focus on the period of 1966 to 1980.

Series One, Administrative Records, is arranged alphabetically by function, and by, and includes annual reports, correspondence, financial materials, Board minutes, and the working papers of various sub-committees, including Publicity, Ushers and P.T.A. Representatives.

Series Two, Production and Publication Materials, is also arranged alphabetically by function and by date, consisting of materials which promoted various performances including flyers, playbills, and educational packets.

Series Three consists of two scrapbooks, the first spanning 1952 to 1968 and consisting primarily of newspaper clippings on the Children's Theatre. Due to the deteriorating nature of the newspaper in this scrapbook, preservation photocopies of its pages have been created. The second scrapbook spans 1969 to 1989 and contains clippings as well as large format publicity posters from Children's Theatre productions. Due to its size, preservation photocopies have not been created.

An appendix is attached to this finding aid listing Children's Theater productions by year from its founding in 1938 to 1990.

Container list

Box 1

Series 1: Administrative records

Folder 1: Annual reports, 1940-48, 1966-79

Folder 2: Annual report under Not-For-Profit Corporation Act, 1941-62

Folder 3: Constitution, bylaws, and organizational history, 1937-86

Folder 4: Correspondence, 1938-69

Folder 5: Correspondence, 1970-88

Folder 6: Executive Board minutes, 1940-66

Folder 7: Executive Board minutes, 1967-79

Box 2

Series 1: Administrative records, cont.

- Folder 1: Executive Board minutes, 1980-94
- Folder 2: Financial, Auditing, 1964-65
- Folder 3: Financial, Gift acquisitions and allocations, 1972-75
- Folder 4: Financial, Receipts, 1938-74
- Folder 5: Financial reports, 1950-2005
- Folder 6: Financial reports, individual performances, 1938-47
- Folder 7: Grant information and applications, 1978-84
- Folder 8: Illinois Theatre Association, Constitution and newsletter, 1976-77
- Folder 9: Membership information, 1938-42, 1962-89
- Folder 10: Officer Duties, 1975

Box 3

Series 1: Administrative records, cont.

- Folder 1: Production licenses, 1940-1973
- Folder 2: Publicity releases and reports, 1941-1976
- Folder 3: PTA representatives, Champaign, 1967-77
- Folder 4: PTA representatives, Urbana, 1969-77
- Folder 5: Ticket sales, 1954-86
- Folder 6: Usher's reports, 1966-71

Series 2: Production and publication materials

- Folder 7 Affiliations, 1970-84
- Folder 8: Arts in the Classroom, n.d.
- Folder 9: Clippings, 1940-2006
- Folder 10: Clippings, n.d.
- Folder 11: Evaluations and reviews, 1972-1982
- Folder 12: Fliers, 1945-83
- Folder 13: Performances – Listing by Year

Box 4

Series 2: Production and publication materials, cont.

- Folder 1: Performance materials, *The Frog Prince*, 1951
- Folder 2: Performance materials, *Dragon, Hermit, and the Princess*, 1972
- Folder 3: Performance materials, *The Red Shoes*, 1973
- Folder 4: Performance materials, *The Canterville Ghost*, 1974
- Folder 5: Performance materials, *The Nutcracker*, 1975
- Folder 6: Performance materials, *Yankee Doodle*, 1976
- Folder 7: Performance materials, *The Point*, 1976
- Folder 8: Performance materials, *Greensleeves' Magic*, 1977
- Folder 9: Performance materials, *Toad of Toad Hall*, 1980
- Folder 10: Performance materials, *She Stoops To Conquer*, 1981
- Folder 11 Performance materials, *The Monstrous Spider*, 1982

Folder 12: Performance materials, *A Tribute to John Philip Sousa*, 1988-89

Folder 13: Photographs, 1952-1975

Folder 14: Playbills, 1972-79

Folder 15: Play scripts, 1952-75

Folder 16: Miscellaneous

Series 3: Scrapbooks

Folder 17: Scrapbook One -- Contains clippings on performances and meetings, as well as yearly full-page spreads on the upcoming season, for circa 1952-1968. *Contents photocopied; original size: Size: 13 x 12 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches*

Box 5 [Oversized]

Series 3: Scrapbooks, cont.

Scrapbook Two -- Oversize, news clippings, photos, educational packets, posters of performances, stage pages, for seasons, c.1969-1989. Size: 25 x 19 x 3 inches

Stage Pages: 14x12 inches