

Guide to the Amata B. Grassi Papers, 1878-1971

(S) *MGZMD 160

Jerome Robbins Dance Division

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
New York, New York**

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Descriptive Summary

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| Title: | Amata B. Grassi Papers, 1878-1971 |
| Collection ID: | (S) *MGZMD 160 |
| Creator: | Grassi, Amata B. |
| Extent: | 4.25 linear feet (7 boxes) |
| Repository: | Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts |

Abstract: The Amata B. Grassi Papers document the personal life and professional career of the early twentieth-century dancer. The collection contains correspondence and personal papers; performance notes; newspaper and magazine clippings; two of her personal diaries; and personal and professional photographs, including some negatives and slides. The focus of the collection covers her dancing years.

Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Preferred Citation

Amata B. Grassi Papers, Collection ID (S) *MGZMD 160, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Custodial History

The Amata B. Grassi Papers were donated to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in August 1977 by Brigitte E. Peterhans.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in 2005.

Biographical Note

Amata Grassi was born in New York on June 1, 1894. Originally named Anna Beatrice Koch she chose her stage name after her mother, Caroline Grasse (1837-1917). Amata Grassi began her dancing career with Anna Pavlova in 1917. In the following year, while touring in Buenos Aires, she met her future first husband, Chester Hale (Chamberlin). Soon after they left the famous dancer to form their own company.

She also danced with the Adolph Bolm Ballet Intime and the Chicago Opera Co., toured in vaudeville, musical comedy and concert. In 1928 she was a premier dancer of Paul Whiteman's *Rio Romance*. During World War II she was company manager of a Major Bowes unit that made a USO tour of Army camps.

She was married to Chester Hale from September 1918 until May 1931. Around the mid-1940s she remarried, to Walter Hussen. After she ended her career as a dancer she began working at the Sheraton Hotel, and started to raise French poodles. In 1950 she is reported to have been an assistant at the hotel's payroll department.

Sources:

- Amata Grassi Papers, An inventory of her papers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Retrieved November 2, 2005 from <http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll/services/rjd/findingaids/AGrassib.html>
- Chicago Sunday Times, Thursday June 22, 1950, section two-2

Scope and Content Note

The Amata B. Grassi papers contain documents, photographs and clippings documenting her personal life and her professional career as a dancer. Both aspects are covered equally. Although the collection spans over almost a century, the majority of the materials cover the period of Amata Grassi's dancing years, from the mid-1910s to 1930s. Her personal diaries (Box 2, folder 4) offer an interesting insight to her personality and everyday life for the periods covered. The collection also contains a considerable number of professional photographs (Box 6), both of herself and other performers of the period, which might be of interest to the researcher. Several letters in the correspondence series (Box 1) provide interesting primary sources to the Spanish Civil War and World War II (folders 6 and 8 respectively). There are no audiovisual materials in this collection, while the later period of Amata Grassi's life is rather underrepresented.

Related Materials Note

Materials related to Amata B. Grassi and complementing the present collection can also be found at the University of Illinois at Chicago (<http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll/services/rjd/findingaids/AGrassib.html>).

Organization

The collection is organized into six series and two sub-series. They are:

Series I: Correspondence, 1916-1971 and undated

Series II: Personal Papers, 1878-1961 and undated

Series III: Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated

Sub-series 1 – Loose Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated

Sub-series 2 – Clippings Booklets, 1917-1928 and undated

Series IV: Photographs, undated

Sub-series 1 – Personal Photographs, undated

Sub-series 2 – Professional Photographs, undated

Series V: Oversized Materials, 1913-1950 and undated

Series Descriptions

Series I: Correspondence, 1916-1971 and undated

1 box, 10 folders

Arrangement: alphabetical and then chronological.

This series contains mostly personal letters and postcards to Amata Grassi from friends and family. Legal, business and financial correspondence can be found in the Personal Papers series. In cases where the sender's last name is unknown, documents are filed under sender's first name.

Series II: Personal Papers, 1878-1961 and undated **1 box, 18 folders**
Arrangement: alphabetical, and within individual files chronological.

This series contains records from Amata Grassi's personal and professional life. It includes several business, financial and legal documents. Of particular interest are two diaries (1917, 1932) handwritten by Amata Grassi herself; programs and several handwritten notes, receipts, costume plans and dancing notes related to various of her performances; and an (otherwise unmarked) book on the *Russian Ballets*. This series also includes records from Amata Grassi's early childhood, letters related to her parents and second husband, Walter Hussen; business cards, function passes and events invites; a few sketches of portraits, a small number of music scores, two telephone number booklets with personal contacts, and a small stamp collection. Empty envelopes found scattered among her papers or previously containing photographs; as well as a few cooking recipes can also be found here.

Series III: Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated **2 boxes, 11 folders**
This series is divided into two sub-series. The first includes loose clippings from newspapers and magazines, and the second consists of five clippings booklets.

Sub-series 1 – Loose Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated **1 box, 6 folders**
Arrangement: chronological.

This series contains the loose clippings from newspapers and magazines found in the collection. They include photographs, advertisements and announcements of performances in which Amata Grassi participated; related to other performers for whom she had an interest in, such as Anna Pavlova or Chester Hale; and a few articles related to poodles, the object of Amata Grassi's career during the later part of her life. This series also includes a small number of entire issues of magazines found in the collection.

Sub-series 2 – Clippings Booklets, 1917-1928 and undated **1 box, 5 folders**
Arrangement: chronological.

This series contains four booklets containing performance programs, and magazine and newspaper clippings, documenting Amata Grassi's career, and one with photographs of other performers. All are put together informally, most likely by Amata Grassi herself, although with very little personal input other than dating and underlining the passages relevant to herself. The majority of the clippings related to her career found in Series III are also present here.

Series IV: Photographs, undated **2 boxes, 12 folders**
This series is divided into two sub-series. The first sub-series includes photographs of Amata Grassi's personal life, and the second photographs of her dancing career.

Sub-series 1 – Personal photographs, undated **1 box, 6 folders**
This sub-series contains photographs of Amata Grassi's friends and family, of herself with friends and family, and with herself with dogs. The sub-series also includes

two files of travel photographs, from Latin America and of various and unidentified locations. It is likely that many of these photographs were taken during tours, but they do not contain images strictly related to her performances. Negatives and a few slides of some prints included in the sub-series can also be found here.

Sub-series 2 – Professional photographs, undated **1 box, 6 folders**

This sub-series contains photographs related to Amata Grassi's dancing career. It contains photographs of her from various performances, dancing or posing in costume. Some of the prints found here have been used for publicity purposes, and appear among the magazines and newspapers clippings. This sub-series also contains photographs of other performers, including several of Chester Hale; many are autographed and dedicated to Amata Grassi. Negatives of some prints included in the sub-series can also be found here.

Series V: Oversized materials, 1913-1950 and undated **1 box, 12 folders**

This series contains several oversized souvenir programs, clippings, a magazine issue and several professional photographs of both Amata Grassi and other performers.

Series I: Correspondence, 1916-1971 and undated

Box 1

- F. 1 A-C, 1925-1961 and undated
- F. 2 D-F, 1916-1961
- F. 3 G-I, 1931-1957 and undated (Includes a letter from Walter, possibly her husband, Walter Hussen)
- F. 4 Hale, Chester, 1935-1971 and undated
- F. 5 J-L, 1943-1961
- F. 6 Llodio, Jacinto, 1925-1938 and undated
- F. 7 M-O, 1955-1961 and undated
- F. 8 Meyer, William, 1939-1956 (Includes several envelopes with censor's tags, which had been collected and kept separately)
- F. 9 P-Z, 1918-1945 and undated
- F. 10 Unidentified, 1920-1948 and undated

Series II: Personal Papers, 1878-1961 and undated

Box 2

- F. 1 Book (Stokes, Adrian, *Russian Ballets*, London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1935)
- F. 2 Business cards, undated
- F. 3 Cooking, undated
- F. 4 Diaries, 1917, 1932
- F. 5 Drawings, undated
- F. 6 Early childhood, 1899 and undated
- F. 7 Empty envelopes, 1948-1961 and undated
- F. 8 Financial documents, 1924-1948
- F. 9 Function passes and invitations, 1925-1930 and undated
- F. 10 Hussen, Walter, 1923-1943 and undated
- F. 11 Legal documents, 1919-1940
- F. 12 Music scores, undated
- F. 13 Parents, 1878-1939 and undated (Includes documents mostly relevant to her father, Joseph Koch, letters addressed to him and evidence of his career. Also includes a letter from Amata Grassi to her father)
- F. 14 Performance-related notes, 1932-1942 and undated
- F. 15 Programs, 1890-1930 and undated
- F. 16 Publicity restaurant menu, undated
- F. 17 Stamps, undated
- F. 18 Telephone number booklets, undated

Series III: Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated

Subseries 1: Loose Clippings, 1916-1960s and undated

Box 3

- F. 1 1916
- F. 2 1920s
- F. 3 1930s
- F. 4 1940s-1960s
- F. 5 Magazines, 1919-1941
- F. 6 Undated

Subseries 2: Clippings Booklets, 1917-1928 and undated

Box 4

- F. 1 1917
- F. 2 1918-1919
- F. 3 1923-1925
- F. 4 1928
- F. 5 Undated

Series IV: Photographs, undated

Subseries 1: Personal Photographs, undated

Friends and family

Box 5

- F. 1 Early years
- F. 2 Later years
- F. 3 Grassi with dogs; elephants, horses
- Travel
- F. 4 Latin America
- F. 5 Various and unidentified locations (Includes some postcards)
- F. 6 Slides and negatives

Subseries 2: Professional Photographs, undated

Grassi

Box 6

- F. 1 Early years
- F. 2 Later years
- F. 3 Hale, Chester
- F. 4 Other performers
- F. 5 Other performers, autographed
- F. 6 Negatives

Series V: Oversized Materials, 1913-1950

Personal papers- programs, 1913-1950

Box 7

- F. 1 Anna Pavlova, 1913-1914
- F. 2 Serge de Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, American Tour 1916-1917
- F. 3 Anna Pavlova, 1920
- F. 4 Anna Pavlova, 1924-1925
- F. 5 *The Ballet Theatre Annual*, 1949-1950
- F. 6 Studies from the Russian Ballet, undated
- Clippings, 1919-1924 and undated
- F. 7 1919
- F. 8 Undated
- F. 9 Magazines (*Theatre Magazine*, May 1924)
- Photographs-professional, 1931 and undated
- F. 10 Grassi, early years
- F. 11 Hale, Chester, 1931 (autographed, to Amata Grassi)
- F. 12 Other performers, autographed, undated