

**Guide to the Helene Obolensky Papers, 1910-1994
(Bulk dates 1976-1984)**

(S) *MGZMD 213

Jerome Robbins Dance Division

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

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Descriptive Summary

Title:	Helene Obolensky Papers
Collection ID:	(S) *MGZMD 213
Creator:	Obolensky, Helene
Extent:	9.79 linear feet (12 boxes)
Repository:	Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Abstract: The Helene Obolensky Papers document Obolensky's activities in the field of dance book publishing. Obolensky (born 1919), who had a varied career in fashion, marketing, public relations, and publishing, later established Helene Obolensky Enterprises, Inc. as a multiple interest corporation and was active in publishing lavish coffee table books under her own imprint during the 1970s and 1980s.

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

Helene Obolensky Papers, (S) *MGZMD 213, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Custodial History

The Helene Obolensky Papers were donated to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in 1995 by Helene Obolensky.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in December 2007.

Biographical Note

Helene Obolensky (born 1919) began her varied career in fashion, marketing, public relations, and publishing in Paris during the 1940s. She worked initially as a personal assistant to designer Coco Chanel and later as a magazine editor while living in France. Obolensky immigrated to the United States, where she became fashion editor for *Town & Country* and *Redbook*. Drawing on her social connections, Princess Obolensky (she was married to Prince Alexander Petrovich Obolensky, a scholar of Slavonic languages), was able to secure the endorsements of celebrities, such as Princess Grace of Monaco, on a wide assortment of projects. She established Helene Obolensky Enterprises, Inc. as a multiple interest corporation and was active in publishing dance books under her own imprint (frequently working out distribution deals with established publishing houses) during the 1970s and 1980s. Among these lavish coffee table works were *The Bolshoi Ballet* (1975), Clive Barnes's *Inside American Ballet Theatre* (1977), *America Dances* (1980) by Agnes De Mille and *Nureyev* (1982), also by Barnes. During this period, Obolensky also began to become involved with co-producing ballet films and television specials.

Scope and Content Note

The Helene Obolensky Papers document Obolensky's activities in the field of dance book publishing. The bulk of the collection consists of Project files which detail editorial and production matters relating to two titles published under the imprint of Helene Obolensky Enterprises, Inc. during the early 1980s, *America Dances* (1980) by Agnes De Mille and *Nureyev* (1982) by Clive Barnes. Materials in these files include clippings, contracts, correspondence, galley proofs, invoices, manuscripts, and photographs. Correspondence is almost entirely limited to professional concerns. Notable correspondents represented in the Project Files include De Mille (although she is represented by only a few items). There are also some letters from the former Diaghilev dancer and choreographer, Serge Lifar, contained in the Subject files series. The Lifar materials apparently were collected by Obolensky as part of separate efforts to publish his memoirs and to persuade Lifar to participate in a documentary on the Diaghilev era. Also of note are several snapshots of Lifar at a house party, with other identifiable Ballets Russes alumni (including Alexandra Danilova) in attendance, as well as some photographs that show Lifar at the Diaghilev exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. There also is a small set of studio portraits of Lifar taken by Max Waldman, some of them with a woman (most likely Obolensky). Oversized materials chiefly consist of production mechanicals for the *Nureyev* book.

Organization

The collection is organized into 3 series. They are:

Series I: Project Files, 1975-1994

Series II: Subject Files, 1910-1983

Series III: Oversized Material, 1985 and undated

Series Descriptions

Series I: Project Files, 1975-1994

7 boxes

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Project Files series is comprised mostly of clippings, contracts, correspondence, financial records, galley proofs, manuscripts, photographs, and other editorial and production files relating to two of the dance books published by Obolensky during the 1980s, *America Dances* and *Nureyev*. Since both books were generously illustrated, much of the material concerns researching and securing permissions for the many photographs used in the books. Also of interest is material regarding the marketing of the *Nureyev* book, which includes some snapshots of its author, Clive Barnes, as well as Rudolf Nureyev at various book signings. The Oversized Material series also includes complete production mechanicals and related galley proofs for *Nureyev*.

Series II: Subject Files, 1910-1983

1 box

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Subject Files series primarily consists of correspondence and research materials relating to various book, film, and television projects in which Obolensky was interested. It is not clear whether or not any of these projects were completed. Of particular note is material relating to Serge Lifar. Obolensky apparently hosted Lifar when he visited the United States and sought to publish an edition of his autobiography and involve him in a documentary film project. Items include some original and copies of letters from Lifar (in Russian), as well as candid and studio photographs. All of the material that predates the 1970s is in the form of photocopies.

Series III: Oversized Material, 1985 and undated

4 boxes

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Oversized Material series contains one folder of photocopies of illustrations for a section of *America Dances* and extensive production materials for *Nureyev*.

Series I: Project Files, 1975-1994 and undated

Box 1

- America Dances*, 1975-1980 and undated (By Agnes De Mille.)
- F. 1 Clippings, 1976-1994 and undated (On Agnes De Mille; includes one article in French.)
- F. 2 Contracts, 1977-1981
- F. 3 Correspondence, 1976-1984 and undated
- F. 4 1976-1979 (Includes letters in French; one note from Agnes De Mille.)
- F. 5 1980
- F. 6 1981-1984
- F. 7 Undated (Includes postcard from Agnes De Mille.)
- F. 8 Editorial notes, undated
- F. 9 Invoices and receipts, 1978-1980 and undated
- F. 10 Macmillan captions and permissions, 1980
- F. 11 Apr.-May, 1980 (Includes items in French.)
- F. 12 June-Aug., 1980 (Includes items in French.)
- Manuscripts, 1979 and undated
- Complete, undated (Photocopy of typescript with corrections.)
- F. 11 1-100, undated

Box 2

- F. 1 101-236, undated
- F. 2 Katherine Dunham script, 1979
- F. 3 Preliminary layout of photographs, undated (Multiple versions.)
- F. 4 Negotiations with Agnes De Mille, 1975-1979
- F. 5 Outlines, undated
- Photograph research, undated
- F. 6 Index cards, undated
- F. 7 Notes, undated
- F. 8 Publicity, 1980 and undated
- F. 9 Research assistants, 1975-1978
- F. 10 Reviews, 1980-1981 and undated
- F. 11 Royalties, 1980-1981
- F. 12 Sample dust jacket, undated

Box 3

- Nureyev*, 1978-1983 and undated (By Clive Barnes.)
- F. 1 Addresses, 1981-1982 and undated
- F. 2 Binding, undated
- F. 3 Clippings, 1975-1983 and undated (Mainly on Nureyev or ballet; some items in French and Russian.)
- Correspondence, 1975-1985 and undated

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General, 1975-1985 and undated (Includes letters in French.)

- F. 4 1975-1981
- F. 5 1982-1985
- F. 6 Undated
- F. 7 Arcata Book Group, 1981-1982 and undated
- F. 8 Channel 13 promotion, 1981-1983
- F. 9 Clarkson Potter, 1982-1985
- F. 10 Rae Barela/WireTrans 800, 1982-1983
- F. 11 S & T World Products, 1993
- F. 12 Jane Wilson, 1981-1982

Box 4

- F. 1 Helene Obolensky Enterprises press information, undated
Index, undated
- F. 2 A-Mi, undated
- F. 3 Mo-Z, undated
- F. 4 Marketing plans, undated
- F. 5 Photographs, undated (Book signings with Barnes and Nureyev.)
- F. 6 Press releases, 1983 and undated
- F. 7 Proposal and outlines, 1981 and undated
- F. 8 Publicity/MKP, 1981-1982 and undated (Marvin Kimmel Productions.)
- F. 9 Reviewer's copies, 1982-1984 and undated
- F. 10 Reviews, 1982-1984 and undated
- F. 11 Revson grant, 1980 and undated
- F. 12 Sales, 1982-1984 and undated

Box 5

- Manuscripts, circa 1982 and undated
 - Complete, 1982 and undated
 - Clive Barnes envelope, undated (Typescript, copies and page proofs with corrections.)
 - Kingsport Press envelope, 1982 (Photocopy and inserts with corrections.)
 - Typescripts, undated
 - Original uncorrected, undated

Box 6

- F. 1 Photocopy with corrections, undated
- F. 2 Unbound gatherings of leaves, circa 1982
- Sections, undated
- F. 3 Carbons, undated
- F. 4 Galley proofs, undated (With final corrections.)
- F. 5 Quotes, undated

Box 7

F. 1-6

Unidentified, undated

Subject Files, 1910-1983 and undated

Box 8

F. 1

Bolshoi Ballet book, 1974-1977 and undated

F. 2

Oleg Briansky film, undated

F. 3

Chanel, 1981-1983 and undated

F. 4

Clippings, 1976-1982

F. 5

The Heritage television proposal, 1979 (Series on Diaghilev.)

Serge Lifar/Ramsay film, 1955-1979 and undated

F. 6

Background, 1955-1979

F. 7

Correspondence, 1969-1979 (Includes letters from Serge Lifar, as well as items in French and Russian.)

Photographs, circa 1978-1979 (Serge Lifar at Metropolitan Museum of Art Diaghilev show and other events.)

F. 8

Negatives, circa 1978-1979

F. 9

Prints, circa 1978-1979

F. 10

Portraits, undated (Max Waldman studio shots of Lifar and Helene Obolensky.)

Mikhail Mordkin subject files, 1910-1920 (Photocopies)

F. 11

American tour, 1911

F. 12

Aziade film, 1917-1972

F. 13

First American appearance, 1910

F. 14

In memoriam, 1939-1951 and undated

F. 15

Music gifts to Ballet Theatre, 1939-1967

F. 16

Personal notes, 1962-1977 and undated

F. 17

The Story of My Life, 1925 (Typescript in English.)

Anna Pavlova book, 1935-1980 and undated

F. 18

Correspondence, 1976-1980

F. 19

Proposals, undated

F. 20

Research materials, 1935-1977 and undated (Includes clippings in Russian and photocopy of letter from Violette Verdy.)

F. 21

Rizzoli, 1978-1979

F. 22

Sample dummy illustrations, 1978 and undated

F. 23

Robert Payne book projects, 1969-1979 (Includes Serge Lifar "autobiography" proposal.)

F. 24

Programs, 1975-1978

Unbound leaves from unidentified book on ballet, undated (Text in German.)

F. 25

Series III: Oversized Material, 1985 and undated

Box 9

America Dances, undated

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F. 1 Illustration citations and layout, undated (Section on theatrical and tap dancing only.)

Nureyev, 1985 and undated

F. 2 Dust jacket, undated

F. 3 Galley proofs, undated

Box 10

Production mechanicals, undated

F. 1 Dust jacket, undated

Box 11

F. 1 1-9, undated

F. 2 10-31, undated

F. 3 32-51, undated

F. 4 52-71, undated

F. 5 72-93, undated

F. 6 94-109, undated

Box 12

F. 1 110-129, undated

F. 2 131-159, undated

F. 3 154-173, undated

F. 4 174-195, undated

F. 5 196-217, undated

F. 6 218-239, undated

F. 7 Reviews, 1985 and undated

Separated Material

- 1 audiocassette, Agnes George De Mille, January 21, 1986