

**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
THE BILLY ROSE THEATRE COLLECTION**

**ELSIE LESLIE, 1881-1966
PAPERS, 1889-1972**

***T-MSS 1978-004
EHE 9/95**

MAIN ENTRY: Elsie Leslie, 1881-1966

TITLE: Papers, 1889-1972

SIZE: ca. 2.8 lin. ft. (4 boxes)

ACCESS: Unrestricted

SOURCE: Gift of Jane Douglass

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT: Child actress, best known for playing the title roles in the original *LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY* (1888-1889) and *THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER*, Elsie Leslie returned to the stage as a young adult to star in *THE RIVALS* (1898) and other plays.

DESCRIPTION: Collection contains letters to Elsie Leslie mostly from friends on personal matters, photographs of her in various roles, and an autograph album.

INTRODUCTION

The Elsie Leslie Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts by Jane Douglass. Douglass, a student of the theater, befriended Leslie and her husband Edwin Milliken, and edited and introduced some of her papers for publication as *TRUSTABLE & PRESHUS FRIENDS* (1977). A copy of this book is held by The Billy Rose Theatre Collection: MWES (Lyde, E.) 78-1614.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE

The Elsie Leslie papers are arranged in three series:

- Series I- Correspondence
- Series II- Autograph album
- Series III- Photographs

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON ELSIE LESLIE

Child actress Elsie Leslie was born on August 14, 1881 in New York City, the daughter of Evelyn Burdick Lyde and Benjamin Tanner Lyde who was a successful merchant until his health failed. Propelled onto the stage by her family's financial needs and aided by the friendship of Joseph Jefferson, Leslie made her first appearance in 1885 at the age of four in Jefferson's production of *RIP VAN WINKLE* in Columbus, Ohio. She had her first marked success as Editha in William Gillette's *EDITHA'S BURGLAR* at the Lyceum Theatre in New York City with E. H. Sothorn. Her claim to fame, however, was the original title role in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY* (1888) in Boston, Massachusetts. This was followed by three years in Daniel Frohman's production of Mark Twain's *THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER* in which she played both parts, co-starring with William Faversham.

Leslie then retired to go to school, but returned to the stage in 1898 to star as Lydia Languish in *THE RIVALS* with Otis Skinner. She was later Dot in *THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH*, Glory Quayle in *THE CHRISTIAN* (1901), Katharine in *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* (1903), the female lead in *THE MAN ON THE CASE* and *ALIAS JIMMY VALENTINE* (1909), toured in *THE MAN ON THE BOX*, and starred with George Arliss in Louis N. Parker's *DISRAELI* (1912).

Leslie married Jefferson Winter, an actor and son of the poet-critic, William Winter in 1901. They lived in New Brighton, Staten Island and were subsequently divorced. In 1918 she married Edwin J. Milliken, an investment banker. Leslie died on October 31, 1966 in New York City. She was 85 years old and was survived by her husband.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The collection consists of correspondence, mostly letters to Leslie from friends and admirers, publicity photographs of Leslie as a child and adult actress, and her autograph album which contains letters, photographs, clippings, autographs, and cards. The letters in this collection are not the letters published in Jane Douglass's *TRUSTABLE AND PRESHUS FRIENDS*, though the collection has been annotated with historical notes by Douglass.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

SERIES 1 - CORRESPONDENCE [1889-1972]

This series contains incoming letters to Elsie Leslie, mostly from friends on personal matters: invitations, travels, health, etc., though there is some discussion of possible roles and compliments on her performances. Includes a few letters to Leslie when she was a child actress. There is an extensive file of letters [1911-1942] from playwright Louis N. Parker to Leslie. Other correspondents include Poultney Bigelow, members of the Samuel Clemens family, Julie Harris, Helen Keller, Schuyler Mathews, Julia Marlowe Sothern, and Alexander Woollcott. There is also a small amount of third party correspondence, primarily letters to her husband, Edwin Milliken.

SERIES II - AUTOGRAPH ALBUM [1889-1943]

One bound volume with "Autographs for Elsie Leslie Lyde" printed in gold across the cover contains correspondence, photographs, clippings, autographs, and cards as well as notes added by the donor, Leslie's editor.

SERIES III - PHOTOGRAPHS [1889-1912]

Photographs consist of six portraits [1889] of Elsie Leslie as a child of eight that were used for publicity, ten portraits as Lydia Languish in *THE RIVALS* [1898], and twenty-one taken in 1901 or after including ten portraits as a young woman, some in unidentified roles, one from *THE CHRISTIAN* [1901], five as Katharine in *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* [1903], two from *ALIAS JIMMY VALENTINE* [1909], two from *THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH*, and one with George Arliss from *DISRAELI* [1912]. Two of the portraits of Leslie as Lydia Languish are in frames she created herself: one is embroidered with forget-me-nots and the other is painted with watercolor over cut-out figures.

Elsie Leslie

BOX LIST

Box 1: Correspondence

Box 2: Autograph album

Box 3: Photographs

Box 4: Photographs in special frames