



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Radio City Music Hall collection of the designs of James Stewart
Morcom and John William Keck**

1933-1979

*T-Vim 2002-005

Processed by Christine Sanchez, Mark C. Maniak.

Summary

Creator: Radio City Music Hall (New York, N.Y.)

Title: Radio City Music Hall collection of the designs of James Stewart Morcom and John William Keck

Date: 1933-1979

Size: 10.68 linear feet (14 boxes)

Source: The collection was donated by Jerry Marshall in 2002.

Abstract: The Radio City Music Hall Collection of the Designs of James Stewart Morcom and John William Keck contain color set designs, including renderings, elevations and details, of productions primarily from the Radio City Music Hall as well as other venues.

Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

Conditions Governing Use: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

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Creator History

James Stewart Morcom was born in Kentucky on July 28, 1906 and grew up in Houston, Texas. After

graduating from Central High School in 1924, Morcom moved to New York City in 1926 to attend the Grand Central Galleries Arts School and the Anderson-Milton School of Theatre. He also joined the Scenic Artists Union in 1926. When S. L. Rothafel opened the Roxy Theatre at Seventh Avenue and Fiftieth Street in 1927, Morcom worked as an Assistant Director for the acclaimed producer and scenic designer Clark Robinson. His tenure lasted four years. In 1931 Morcom married his childhood classmate Cecile Cobb.

Morcom began designing for the brand new Radio City Music Hall in 1933 as an Assistant to Clark Robinson, the Music Hall's second Art Director, and continued to work with Robinson on various creative projects that included plays, musicals, night club revues, and motion pictures. Facing hard times and unemployment in the 1930s, Morcom found work in the early years of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) for approximately 6-8 months. During this same period he also designed windows for the National Shoe Company, and created back drops for the Columbia Burlesque theater chain before leaving the United States in 1936 to work in London for Raoul N. Dubois on Cochran's *Coronation Revue*.

After seeing Orson Welles perform on stage in *Dr. Faustus*, Morcom started working for Welles' Mercury Theatre Productions designing the sets at union minimum salary in exchange to be cast as an extra in the plays. Morcom designed sets for Welles' *Five Kings*, *Too Much Johnson* and *Native Son*. In 1940 Morcom took on various assorted projects, such as designing for the Ford Theatre Ballet and Sue Hastings Marionettes at the New York World's Fair, designing for productions at Madison Square Garden, the Gay White Way Club in New York City for George White, and the Ballet Caravan.

Before entering the Army in May 1942, Morcom created numerous ballet sets for the prominent choreographer, director, and performer, Eugene Loring. Morcom served in the Special Service Arts Department in WWII, designing sets and costumes for productions in Paris and London. After WWII, he stayed in London and attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts on the GI Bill of Rights and studied acting. Once Morcom returned to New York City he began to design for such celebrated clientele as Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe, the New York City Ballet, and designed costumes for Radio City Music Hall in the late 1940s. Morcom became the fifth Art Director for Radio City Music Hall in 1950, and retired from the theater in 1973. Morcom was succeeded as Art Director by John William Keck.

James Morcom participated in an oral history interview, conducted by Lorraine Brown on May 10, 1977, for the Special Collections & Research Center for the Federal Theatre Project at George Mason University. He died on May 28, 1988.

John William Keck, son of the well-known American sculptor Charles Keck, was born in Greenwich Village, New York City, on December 4, 1929. He graduated from the High School of Music and Art and attended Pratt Institute. Keck got his start as a scenic painter working in summer stock in the 1950s, and eventually became a well-respected scenic designer in the New York theater community. Keck was a designer at Radio City Music Hall for several years before he succeeded James Stewart Morcom as Art Director in 1973, and also worked at Nolan Scenery Studios. He resigned from Radio City Music Hall in the spring of 1980, then moved on to design sets for the Metropolitan Opera House. He died on April 3, 2001.

Scope and Content Note

The design collection consists of color set designs (mostly renderings, but also some elevations and details) for some of the stage shows at the Radio City Music Hall. The collection is not complete and is missing numerous years and productions. Many of the designs are unidentified as to the title and year.

One set of designs are unidentified as to the name of the designer. All items are shelved in the Rose Building; advance notification is required for access.

Arrangement: Series I: James Stewart Morcom - Designs Series II: John William Keck - Designs
Sub-series 1 - Oversized Designs Sub-series 2 - Numbered Productions Sub-series 3 - Titled
Productions Sub-series 4 - Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs - Sets and Details Sub-series 5 -
Unidentified Series III: Unidentified Designs

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Set design drawings

Subjects

Theaters -- Stage-setting and scenery

Names

Radio City Music Hall (New York, N.Y.)

Keck, John William, 1929-2001

Morcom, James Stewart, 1906-1988

Container List

Series I: James Stewart Morcom - Designs 1933-1965 (2.66 linear feet (1 oversized box + 1 oversized folder)

This series consists of original designs in the form of pastels, watercolors, elevations and renderings. All are either matted or mounted, many are undated and all are oversized. They are arranged chronologically, first by date and title of the production, and then by production number. A couple of the designs were done by other designers, but drawn or painted by Morcom. Box 1A is shelved in the Rose Building mapcases; advance notification is required for access.

Chronological, by date and production number.

- b. 1 f. 1 **Ghost train (production #1)** 1933 Jan. 19 (1 folder)
Painting elevation for locomotive set piece, watercolor, drawn by Morcom and designed by Clark Robinson.
- b. 1 f. 2 **Geisha land (production #1)** 1933 Jan. 19 (1 folder)
Painting elevation of a Buddha image, watercolor, drawn by Morcom, designed by Clark Robinson.
- b. 1 f. 3 **Marionette ballet** 1933 Jan. 26 (1 folder)
Painting elevation of a marionette, watercolor.
- b. 1 f. 4 **"Orchid to you" (production #20)** 1933 May 25 (1 folder)
Painting elevation, done in pastels. Design is possibly by Clark Robinson as it is initialed "C. R."
- b. 1 f. 5 **"Milady's fan" (production #30)** 1933 Aug. 23 (1 folder)
Elevation of an image of a woman with a fan.
- b. 1 f. 6 **"Victorian shelf group"** (1 folder)
Undated elevation depicting details on a shelf unit.
- b. 1 f. 7 **Unidentified rendering** (1 folder)
Undated and unidentified watercolor rendering depicting a moonlight scene in a boat.
- b. 1 f. 8 **Production #410, ("autumn album")** 1951 Oct. (1 folder)
Painting elevation for drop, in pencil and pastels.
- b. 1 f. 9 **Production #415, ("band box revue")** 1952 May (1 folder)
Rendering, in pastels.
- b. 1 f. 10 **Production #457** (1 folder)
Rendering, in pastels, of a swamp scene.
- b. 1 f. 11 **Production #474** (1 folder)
Undated rendering, in crayon, of a tropical scene.
- b. 1 f. 12 **Production #477, ("out of this world")** 1958 Jan. (1 folder)
Rendering, in pastels, depicting a woman aerialist.
- b. 1 f. 13 **Production #498, ("let's go places")** 1960 Jan. (1 folder)
Rendering, in watercolors, of a tropical scene.
- b. 1 f. 14 **Production #520, ("to the arts")** 1962 Feb. (1 folder)
Rendering, in crayon, depicting a scene with a Greek myth motif.
- b. 1 f. 15 **Production #525, ("olé!")** 1962 (1 folder)
Rendering, in crayon, depicting a Gypsy scene.
- b. 1 f. 16 **Production #536** (1 folder)
Undated rendering, in pastels and watercolors.
- b. 1 f. 17 **Production #556** (1 folder)
Undated rendering, in pastels, with note on back: "Xmas-Leonidoff" .
- b. 1A **"Times Square"** 1949 (1 oversized folder)
Rendering, in watercolors and pastels, depicting a Times Square scene from 1949.

Series II - John William Keck - Designs ca. 1973-1984 (10.23 linear feet (5 boxes, 5 folders))

This series contains details, plans, sketches, renderings and elevations done in watercolors, pastels and pencil. Some of the items have been matted. For the most part they represent Keck's work at Radio City Music Hall, but there are a few items that represent work that he did on outside projects. Many are undated and unidentified.

Sub-series 1: Oversized Designs

Sub-series 2: Numbered Productions

Sub-series 3: Titled Productions

Sub-series 4: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* -Sets and Details

Sub-series 5: Unidentified

Sub-series 1: Oversized Designs 1974-1984 (2.66 linear feet (1 oversized box))

The material in this sub-series includes renderings, details and sketches, although most of the items are renderings. The media includes watercolors, pastels and pencil. The titled productions are arranged alphabetically (these include outside projects) and the numbered productions (which are all Radio City Music Hall designs) are arranged chronologically. There is one item that is not an original: a poster, designed by Keck, for a skating show. Many items are undated.

Alphabetical and chronological.

- b. 2 f. 1 ***Christmas - '76'*** 1976 (1 folder)
Three renderings, in watercolors and pastels, representing three scenes from the 1976 Christmas show. The scenes include: "The Skaters: Ballet and Singers", "The Penguin Hoedown", "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers - The Rockettes".
- b. 2 f. 2 ***The country girl (Asbury Park)*** (1 folder)
Two undated renderings, in watercolors, for a production of Clifford Odets' *The Country Girl* in Asbury Park, New Jersey.
- b. 2 f. 3 ***Fiddler on the roof, (Jones Beach Theater)*** 1974 (1 folder)
Four renderings, in pastels, depicting scenes from a production of *Fiddler On the Roof* at the Jones Beach Theater (Wantagh, N.Y).
- b. 2 f. 4 ***Superskates XI, (poster)*** 1984 (1 folder)
Reproduction of a poster designed by Keck.
- b. 2 f. 5 **Production #631** (1 folder)
Undated rendering, in pastels, depicting a Russian winter scene.
- b. 2 f. 6 **Production #633** 1974 (1 folder)
Three renderings, in pastels and watercolors, depicting Easter scenes.
- b. 2 f. 7 **Production #638** 1974 (1 folder)
One rendering, in watercolors, depicting a winter scene.
- b. 2 f. 8 **Production #651** 1977 (1 folder)
A rendering (in watercolors), details and sketches, in pencil, depicting an Easter show. Segments include *Top Hats and Tails* and *A Journey through Peter Gennaro's Mind*.
- b. 2 f. 9 **Unidentified** (1 folder)
Undated and unidentified rendering, in pastels and watercolors, depicting a spring-like scene.

Sub-series 2: Numbered Productions ca. 1973-1980 (18 folders)

This sub-series contains designs identified by production number. The Radio City Music Hall productions were assigned numbers consecutively and appear to have been carried over from year to year, rather than starting from number one each year. Most of the items are small renderings, in watercolors and pastels, depicting scenes from the production. There are occasional notes indicating either the name of the scene, or its sequence in the production. Nearly all the items are undated and most of them are matted.

- b. 3 f. 1 **Production #641** (1 folder)
Four undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, depicting patriotic scenes.

Series II - John William Keck - Designs (cont.)

Sub-series 2: Numbered Productions (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 2 **Production(s) #641, 647** (1 folder)
Four undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, depicting scenes with a dance motif.
- b. 3 f. 3 ***Production #642 - 1776 (Motion picture)*** (1 folder)
Nine undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels with a patriotic theme, incorporating scenes from the motion picture *1776*.
- b. 3 f. 4 **Production #643** (1 folder)
Four undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with notes. Some of the scenes have a patriotic theme.
- b. 3 f. 5 **Production #644 (Christmas) 1976** (1 folder)
Eight undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with notes, for the 1976 Christmas show.
- b. 3 f. 6 **Production #645** (1 folder)
Five undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes.
- b. 3 f. 7 **Production #646** (1 folder)
Twelve undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with notes. The scenes have various themes.
- b. 3 f. 8 **Production #647** (1 folder)
Ten undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes. Most of the scenes have a patriotic theme.
- b. 3 f. 9 **Production #649** (1 folder)
Two undated renderings, with a musical theme.
- b. 3 f. 10 **Production #651 (Easter)** (1 folder)
Five undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with an Easter theme.
- b. 4 f. 1 **Production #653** (1 folder)
Two undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with notes, depicting outdoor scenes.
- b. 4 f. 2 **Production #654** (1 folder)
Ten undated renderings, in watercolors, some with notes, depicting New York City themes.
- b. 4 f. 3 **Production #655 (Christmas) 1977** (1 folder)
Three renderings, in watercolors, some with notes, for the 1977 Christmas show.
- b. 4 f. 4 **Production #658** (1 folder)

Eight undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes, depicting a Rockettes theme.
- b. 4 f. 5 **Production #659** (1 folder)
Eight undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes, depicting various themes, including a patriotic one. Two of the renderings are photocopies.
- b. 4 f. 6 **Production #660** (1 folder)
Seven undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes, depicting minstrel themes.
- b. 4 f. 7 **Production #661 (Christmas) ca. 1978** (1 folder)
Six undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with notes, for a Christmas show.
- b. 4 f. 8 **Production #662 (Easter) ca. 1979** (1 folder)
Five undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, some with notes, for an Easter show.

Sub-series 3: Titled Productions ca. 1973-1980 (5 folders)

The items in this sub-series represent productions that Keck designed both at Radio City Music Hall and for outside projects. The Radio City productions are identified by title or subject, rather than production number. All the items are renderings, in watercolors and/or pastels; most are undated.

Alphabetical.

Series II - John William Keck - Designs (cont.)

Sub-series 3: Titled Productions (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 9 **Asbury Park Productions** (1 folder)
Three undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, for productions in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Productions represented include *I am a Camera* and *Bell, Book and Candle*.
- b. 4 f. 10 **"It's spring"** 1980 (1 folder)
Six undated renderings, in watercolors, depicting spring-like themes.
- b. 4 f. 11 **"Manhattan" (unnumbered)** (1 folder)
Four undated renderings, in watercolors, with a Manhattan theme.
- b. 4 f. 12 **"A Tony Randall celebrity love roast"** 1979 Feb. 18 (1 folder)
Four renderings, in watercolors and pastels, depicting scenes from a variety show.
- b. 4 f. 13 **Vienna Boy's Choir (unnumbered)** (1 folder)
Four undated renderings, in watercolors and pastels, depicting scenes from a Vienna Boy's Choir show.

Sub-series 4: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs - Sets and Details (18 folders)

This sub-series contains items related to a Radio City Music Hall production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and represents the most complete collection of designs and details. Items in this sub-series include details and elevations for a number of props, such as the magic mirror, as well as details and renderings for set pieces. Many of the items are oversized and all are undated. The arrangement of the items reflects their subject matter as well as the size of the item. Four items, because of their odd sizes, are housed separately in individual folders, listed as Boxes 7-10. These items are shelved separately in the Rose Building. Please consult a librarian for access; advance notice is required.

By subject and size.

- b. 5 f. 1 **Queen's fan** (1 folder)
Detail, in watercolor and pencil, of hand prop.
- b. 5 f. 2 **Queen's props** (1 folder)
Details, in watercolors, with notes, of various hand props. Items are not drawn to scale.
- b. 5 f. 3 **"Glittering garlands"** (1 folder)
Painting elevation, in watercolors, of a set detail.
- b. 5 f. 4 **Evil trees** (1 folder)
Four renderings depicting front and back views of set pieces.
- b. 5 f. 5-8 **Unidentified** (4 folders)
Unidentified renderings, elevations and details of various set pieces, mostly depicting a castle, done in watercolors and pastels.
- b. 6 f. 1 **Unidentified** (1 folder)
Three unidentified renderings, in watercolors, representing exterior and interior views of a peasant house.
- b. 6 f. 2 **Village ground row** (1 folder)
Two elevations, in watercolors.
- b. 6 f. 3 **Unidentified** (1 folder)
Fragment of an elevation, in watercolors, showing details of curtains.
- b. 6 f. 4 **Evil tree #1- back view** (1 folder)
Elevation, in watercolors, of set piece.
- b. 6 f. 5 **Prop pieces** (1 folder)
Three dimensional details, in watercolors, of various set props, with notes.
- b. 6 f. 6 **Village house** (1 folder)
Elevation, in watercolors, of set piece, with notes.
- b. 7 **Unidentified** (1 folder)
Oversized rendering, in watercolors, of castle scene.

Series II - John William Keck - Designs (cont.)

Sub-series 4: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs - Sets and Details (cont.)

- b. 8 **Unidentified** (1 folder)
Oversized elevation, in watercolors and pencil, of bell rafter.
- b. 9 **Magic mirror** (1 folder)
Oversized elevation, in watercolors, and detail, in watercolor and mylar overlay, of set piece.
- b. 10 **Show portal** (1 folder)
Two renderings (one is a photograph) and one elevation, in watercolors, of a set piece.

Sub-series 5: Unidentified ca. 1973-1980 (12 folders)

Items in this sub-series have no identification, either by production number or title, but they are all designs by Keck. While all the items are unidentified, some of them are numbered, indicating they are part of a sequence of scenes. The types of materials include renderings, an elevation and several details, done mostly in watercolors. They are arranged according to the subject matter represented. All, but one, are undated.

Alphabetical, by subject.

- b. 11 f. 1 **Brass band** (1 folder)
One rendering, in watercolors, depicting a scene with a brass band.
- b. 11 f. 2 **Columns** (1 folder)
Two renderings, in watercolors, with representing scenes with columns.
- b. 11 f. 3 **Details - patriotic** (1 folder)
Seven details, housed in separate envelopes, with a patriotic theme. All are watercolors. These are fragile items, please handle with care.
- b. 11 f. 4 **Easter** (1 folder)
Two renderings, one matted, with an Easter theme, in watercolors and pastels.
- b. 11 f. 5 **Elevation** (1 folder)
Elevation, in pencil, with no scale indicated.
- b. 11 f. 6 **Film salute** (1 folder)
Rendering, in watercolors, with film related theme.
- b. 11 f. 7 **Orchid motif** (1 folder)
Rendering, in watercolors, with an orchid motif. There is also a title written on the rendering: *"I'm Getting Too Old For All This Jazz"*.
- b. 11 f. 8 **Patriotic** (1 folder)
Six renderings, in watercolors and pastels, with a patriotic theme.
- b. 11 f. 9 **Trellis** (1 folder)
One rendering, in watercolors and pastels, with trellises being the dominant design theme.
- b. 11 f. 10 **West Point** (1 folder)
Rendering, in watercolors and pastels, representing a scene from the West Point Military Academy.
- b. 11 f. 11 **Unidentified 1977** (1 folder)
Two renderings, in watercolors and pastels.
- b. 11 f. 12 **Miscellaneous** (1 folder)
Six renderings, in watercolors and pastels, representing various scenes.

Series III - Unidentified Designs ca. 1973-1980 (2 linear feet (1 oversized box + 1 oversized folder)

Items in this sub-series contain no indication as to who designed them. They also contain no titles, production numbers or dates. All items are renderings, done in watercolors and pastels. One rendering contains a three dimensional element.

By size.

Series III - Unidentified Designs (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 1 **Exterior scene with three dimensional element** (1 folder)
Rendering, in watercolors and pastels, depicting a scene in what appears to be a swamp.
- b. 12 f. 2 **Ballroom staircase** (1 folder)
Rendering, in pastels, depicting a ballroom staircase.
- b. 13 **Unisphere and fireworks** (1 oversized folder)
Rendering, in pastels and watercolors, of a fantasy scene.