



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

King-Coit School and Children's Theatre papers

1891-1997

*T-Mss 2002-014

Processed by Jennifer L. Winters.

Summary

Creator: Rodman, Ellen

Title: King-Coit School and Children's Theatre papers

Date: 1891-1997

Size: 3 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: The materials were collected by Ellen Rodman and were donated to The Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in 2002.

Abstract: Ellen Rodman collected this material about the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre. The King-Coit School and Children's Theatre existed in New York City from 1923 to 1959. Its unique teaching style used the arts, specifically plays, to immerse children in other cultures and time periods.

Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

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

Preferred citation: King-Coit School & Children's Theatre Papers, *T-Mss 2002-014, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Jennifer L. Winters; Machine-readable finding aid created by Jennifer L. Winters.

Separated Materials:

Audiovisual materials separated from archival collections are cataloged individually and can be found in the Library catalog. Search CATNYP, The New York Public Library catalog.

9 sound recordings: 8 cassettes and 1 reel-to-reel. Three of the cassettes are the narration for a film about the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre. There is one cassette (about 10 minutes) of former King-Coit students reminiscing. The remainder of the recordings are related to the exhibition of King-Coit materials at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Creator History

Edith King (1884-1975) and Dorothy Coit (1889-1976) first collaborated on children's theater productions while they were both employed at the Buckingham School in Massachusetts. The success of these productions led them to open their own school and children's theater in New York City in 1923. The King-Coit Children's Theatre and School offered arts programs for children (5-15 years old) on weekday afternoons and weekends. King taught drawing and painting classes, while Coit was responsible for acting and dancing. The student body included many children of the rich and famous, and included such notables as Anne Baxter, Madeleine L'Engle, and Lee Remick.

The school was unique in its teaching style. Studies were guided by the ultimate goal of producing a play. Students were immersed in the time period of the chosen story, including intensive study of its music and artworks. The philosophy was to make the children feel comfortable in the given culture, so the acting would feel and look as natural as possible. The stated goal was for perfection. Through weeks of repetition, all the children would learn the entire script, and specific roles weren't assigned until shortly before the performances. Though the children's paintings and drawings often served as inspiration for King's set and costume designs, the children were seldom involved in the actual construction of sets, costumes, or properties.

The plays were well reviewed and popular, but were performed for short runs in small theaters, and ticket sales did not supply much funding. The school and theater relied heavily on grants and private donations throughout its existence. It finally closed in 1959 when health concerns led to King's retirement. Coit declined to continue King-Coit without her valued partner, but did continue to teach occasional classes at other schools throughout the 1960s.

Scope and Content Note

In her efforts to write her dissertation on the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre Ellen Rodman collected a variety of materials. Through printed Author's Queries Rodman requested any and all information on King-Coit, which often resulted in a continuing correspondence. Rodman composed a standard questionnaire to probe each person's involvement with the school and/or theater, and both the questionnaire and the variety of answers are included in the collection. This series and Rodman's research materials make up the two largest series in the collection.

In addition to producing a dissertation, Rodman contributed to a 1979 exhibition of King-Coit materials at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Many of the photographs in this collection were in that exhibition, and photographs of the exhibition are also included. Printed materials by or about King-Coit complete this collection.

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence Sub-series 1- Individuals Sub-series 2- Institutions Series II: Research Materials Series III: Library for the Performing Arts Exhibit Series IV: Photographs Series V: Published Materials Series VI: Oversized Materials

Key Terms

Subjects

Acting -- Study and teaching -- New York (State) -- New York

College and school drama, American -- New York (State) -- New York

Drama in education -- New York (State) -- New York

Theater and youth -- New York (State) -- New York

Names

Rodman, Ellen

Coit, Dorothy

King, Edith W.

King-Coit School and Children's Theatre

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Container List

Series I: Correspondence 1978-1997 (1 box)

This series contains correspondence between Rodman and various individuals/institutions produced during her King-Coit research. It includes responses to public queries for information regarding King-Coit as well as responses to specific questions posed by Rodman.

Sub-series 1- Individuals

Sub-series 2- Institutions

Sub-series 1 - Individuals 1978-1982 (1 box)

This sub-series contains correspondence between Rodman and former King-Coit students, parents, and instructors. It includes many individual's recollections, as well as samples of printed public queries, and copies of the questionnaire Rodman sent out. Of special note is the correspondence with Dorothy Coit's sister, Elisabeth Coit, which includes portions of Rodman's dissertation with Elisabeth Coit's comments.

- b. 1 f. 1 Contact List
- b. 1 f. 2 Queries
- b. 1 f. 3 Sample Questionnaire
- b. 1 f. 4 Barr, Elinor
- b. 1 f. 5 Coit, Elisabeth
- b. 1 f. 6 Cunningham, Minere & Ty 1978
- b. 1 f. 7 Cusick, Edla 1978
- b. 1 f. 8 Davidson, Frank & Izaline 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 9 De Florez, Peter 1978-1982
- b. 1 f. 10 DeKay, Ormonde 1978
- b. 1 f. 11 Diehl, Sylvia 1978
- b. 1 f. 12 Fiske, Jane 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 13 Glackens, Ira 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 14 Gregory, Mary Palache 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 15 Gugler, Ann 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 16 Howell, Alfred 1978
- b. 1 f. 17 Hunter, Maragaret 1979
- b. 1 f. 18 Kantor, Martha Ryther 1978
- b. 1 f. 19 Kellogg, Barbara 1978
- b. 1 f. 20 Kidwell, Emily & Otis 1978
- b. 1 f. 21 LeClercq, Tanaquil 1978
- b. 1 f. 22 Macy, Gertrude 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 23 Melanos, Jack 1978
- b. 1 f. 24 Reeder, Flora 1978
- b. 1 f. 25 Wagner, Ellen 1978
- b. 1 f. 26 General Correspondence- A-K 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 27 General Correspondence- M-Z 1978-1982

Series I: Correspondence (cont.)

Sub-series 2 - Institutions 1978-1997 (12 folders)

This sub-series contains Rodman's correspondence with various institutions regarding Edith King, Dorothy Coit, or the school and children's theatre. Included are copies of Coit's yearbook pages from Radcliffe College, and Rodman's correspondence with Museum of the City of New York regarding the donation of King-Coit materials.

- b. 2 f. 1 **Brown University 1978**
- b. 2 f. 2 **Chelsea (Mass.) School Department 1979**
Includes Edith King's high school transcript.
- b. 2 f. 3 **Coudert Brothers 1979**
- b. 2 f. 4 **Edwin Gould Foundation for Children 1979**
- b. 2 f. 5 **Emerson College 1979**
- b. 2 f. 6 **Lehigh University 1979**
- b. 2 f. 7 **Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1978**
- b. 2 f. 8 **Metropolitan Museum of Art 1979-1980**
- b. 2 f. 9 **Museum of the City of New York 1978-1997**
Includes records regarding donation of King-Coit materials to the museum.
- b. 2 f. 10 **New York University 1977-1978**
- b. 2 f. 11 **Radcliffe College 1978-1979**
Includes Dorothy Coit's high school transcript.
- b. 2 f. 12 **Rhode Island School of Design 1978**

Series II: Research Materials 1934-1985 (14 folders)

This series contains materials collected by Rodman regarding King-Coit. It includes Rodman's handwritten notes, copies of articles/book excerpts/clippings, copies of financial reports, materials regarding two films about King-Coit, lists of students and of plays performed, copies of speeches and correspondence made by King and/or Coit, and an abstract of Rodman's thesis.

- b. 2 f. 13 **Abstract of thesis**
- b. 2 f. 14 **Articles & Book Excerpts about King-Coit 1929-1979**
- b. 2 f. 15 **Bibliography Notes**
- b. 2 f. 16 **Clippings 1979-1985**
- b. 2 f. 17 **Correspondence To/From King/Coit 1940-1961**
- b. 2 f. 18 **Films About King-Coit**
- b. 2 f. 19 **Financial Reports**
- b. 2 f. 20 **Holroyd Correspondence 1970-1979**
- b. 2 f. 21 **Interview Notes 1977-1979**
- b. 2 f. 22 **Library Notes**
- b. 2 f. 23 **Plays & Seasons Performed 1917-1958**
- b. 2 f. 24 **Programs**
- b. 2 f. 25 **Registrants 1920-1958**
- b. 2 f. 26 **Speeches Given By/On Behalf Of King-Coit**

Series III: Library for the Performing Arts Exhibit 1976-1979 (2 folders)

This series contains materials related to the 1979 King-Coit exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. There is an array of materials including invitations, press releases and labels from the exhibition.

- b. 3 f. 1 **Lincoln Center Exhibit Materials 1979**
- b. 3 f. 2 **Lincoln Center Exhibit Correspondence 1976-1979**

Series IV: Photographs 1891-1979 (9 folders)

This series includes photographs and negatives of Dorothy Coit and Edith King, and the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre and its productions. It also includes photographs and negatives of and from the exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and of its later mounting in Kansas City.

- b. 3 f. 3 Coit, Dorothy 1891-1975
- b. 3 f. 4 Coit, Dorothy at Trent School 1967-1968
- b. 3 f. 5 Coit, Dorothy at Dalton School 1968
- b. 3 f. 6 Exhibit at Library for the Performing Arts (photographs of) 1979
- b. 3 f. 7 Exhibit at Library for the Performing Arts (photographs from)
- b. 3 f. 8 Exhibit in Kansas City 1979
- b. 3 f. 9 Prendergast Portraits of King & Coit
- b. 3 f. 10 Tableaux of King-Coit Productions

Series V: Published Materials 1909-1977 (4 folders)

This series includes two books written by Dorothy Coit, a copy of the play *Aucassin and Nicolette* (a King-Coit favorite), and a book about Snedens Landing that briefly discusses the early days of the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre.

- b. 3 f. 11 *Aucassin and Nicolette* 1909
- b. 3 f. 12 *The Ivory Throne of Persia* 1929
- b. 3 f. 13 *Kai Khosru* 1934
- b. 3 f. 14 *The Tonetti Years at Sneden's Landing* 1977

Series VI: Oversized Materials 1922-1979 (1 box)

This series consists mainly of copies of articles and book excerpts regarding King-Coit. It also includes New York Public Library newsletters listing "The King-Coit Children's Theatre" exhibition, and a poster from the Arcadian School that was originally with interview notes. (Alexander Cortesi, Vice President of the Arcadian School, was a former King-Coit student.)

- b. 4 f. 1 Articles/Book Excerpts about King-Coit
- b. 4 f. 2 Articles/Book Excerpts about King-Coit
- b. 4 f. 3 Articles/Book Excerpts about King-Coit
- b. 4 f. 4 Articles/Book Excerpts about King-Coit
- b. 4 f. 5 New York Public Library Newsletters 1979
- b. 4 f. 6 Arcadian School Poster 1979

From Interview Notes - Vice President of the Arcadian School, Alexander C. Cortesi, was a former King-Coit student. The Arcadia School was very similar to the King-Coit School and Children's Theatre.