



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Edith Segal papers, Additions

1915-2014

(S) *MGZMD 355

Compiled by Robyn Hjernstad, 2014 Original order and folder titles were maintained.

Summary

Creator: Segal, Edith, 1902-

Title: Edith Segal papers, Additions

Date: 1915-2014

Size: 4.33 linear feet (11 boxes, 2 oversized folders)

Source: Donated by Shari Segal Goldberg, 2000 and 2011.

Abstract: Edith Segal (1902-1997) was an American choreographer, song writer, and poet. Her work examined issues such as workers' rights and racial equality through a socialist lens. The Edith Segal papers (1915-2014) document her involvement in progressive dance, with the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Theatre Project, and her work as instructor at recreational resorts in New York and New England, particularly Camp Kinderland. The collection consists of teaching files, Camp Kinderland files, Federal Theatre Project files, photographs, and tribute albums.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

Preferred citation: Edith Segal papers, Additions, (S) *MGZMD 355. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

Edith Segal (1902-1997) was an American choreographer, song writer, and poet. Born to immigrant

parents in New York City, Segal began studying dance around 1915 under Blanche Talmud at the Neighborhood Playhouse. She was committed to leftist ideology and her work examined issues such as workers' rights and racial equality alongside the phrase "Art is a Weapon," a slogan she created upon her return from a visit to the Soviet Union around 1930. Some of her early works were in dedication to early communist ideologies associated with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In 1929 she formed her first company, The Red Dancers, and in 1930 she created her best known choreographic piece: Black and White.

In addition to dancing with her company, Segal taught at several leftist camps and recreational resorts in New York and New England, including Camp Kinderland, the Unity House, Cedar Isle Camp, Camp Nitgedaiget, and Camp Wocolona. In the mid to late 1930s she began teaching at these camps almost exclusively. At this time she was also involved with the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Theatre Project in New York and Detroit. Segal wrote several books of poetry from the 1950s to the 1980s, some of which were illustrated by her husband, Samuel Kamen.

Edith Segal died in 1997.

Scope and Content Note

The Edith Segal papers (1915-2014) document Segal's involvement in progressive dance, with the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Theatre project, and her work as an instructor at recreational resorts in New York and New England, particularly Camp Kinderland. The collection is arranged into 9 sections: Autobiographical Files; Copyright Documentation; Correspondence; Teaching Files; Camp Kinderland Files; Federal Theatre Project Files; Photographs; Programs; and Tribute Albums.

Autobiographical Files contain mostly autobiographical manuscript materials and notes on Segal's earliest performances. Of special note is Segal's first dance contract signed by Ivan Tarasoff and Segal, labeled in her hand "first dance contract."

Copyright Documentation includes copyright registrations Segal obtained for her poetry and writing including the books *Take My Hand : Poems and Songs for Lovers and Rebels* and *Be My Friend and Other Poems for Young People*.

Correspondence includes personal correspondence, dance research correspondence with doctoral candidates, and letters from those in the community affected by the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that took place in September 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama. Segal wrote a poem titled "Ballad for Four Children and A President" as a remembrance for those whose lives were lost. Segal also recited this poem at a Bill of Rights Day Dinner the same year. There is one folder of correspondence (Box 11 Folder 6) from other prominent contemporary artists, authors, and activists including Martha Graham, Dr. Spock, Pete Seeger, Eleanor Roosevelt, Langston Hughes, Harry Golden, and Rockwell Kent.

Teaching files in the collection are arranged by subject. They hold sheet music, scripts, choreographic notes, song lyrics, and instructions for children's singing and dance. Some of these materials are in Yiddish and Hebrew. Programs for recitals put on by the Workers Dance League and The Red Dancers are also present here. Along with the programs are meeting minutes, choreographic notes, and an organizational report for the Worker's Dance League.

Camp Kinderland Files are arranged chronologically by year with some material in Yiddish and Hebrew in addition to English. They hold performance title lists, recital programs, scripts, song lyrics, and notes. The Kinderland Journal and dance reports by season are also included. Additionally, this file contains

correspondence and documentation regarding the New York state investigation into leftist activities of performers and artists related to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations. This file includes Segal's subpoena to appear before New York investigative board for questioning.

Federal Theatre Project material consists of programs, one announcement for a Lenin Memorial meeting, a report on choreography for the WPA production "One Third of a Nation," and a speech written to announce the production. Material pertaining to the Detroit Federal Theatre consists primarily of programs and announcements, as well as an annual report for the first federal summer in 1937.

Photographs in this collection thoroughly document a wide range of Segal's activities. They detail performances, classes, group exercises, candid pictures of Segal with peers, and portraits. Several of the photographs show performances of Segal with her dance troupe, the Red Dancers. Images of Segal teaching at the Camp Kinderland and of student performances there are extensive. Other activities that Segal was involved in that are well represented through the photographs include Segal's time at Unity House, the summer resort of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU); Cedar Isle Camp; Camp Nitgedaiget; Camp Wocolona; and the Lenin Memorial Pageant and Ballet. Photographs from the 1960s and 1970s show Segal teaching in Moscow, London, and at the Moshulu Montefiore Center in the Bronx. Some personal and family photographs are also present. Most of the photographs are annotated and date from 1915 to 1940, though the entire run dates from 1915 to 1991.

The programs are from a range of performances including Mordkin Ballet, Anna Pavlova dance performance, Broadway theatre performance of *Pipe Dream*, and a memorial performance for labor activist Joe Hill.

The tribute albums contain letters of admiration, programs, and poems. Segal's scrapbook dedicated to her book, *Poems and Songs for Ethel and Julius Rosenberg*, primarily contains thank you letters from friends and colleagues to whom she sent the book.

The majority of the collection is in English, with some materials in Yiddish and Hebrew.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Albums (books)
Notes (documents)
Photographs
Programs (documents)
Songs (musical compositions)

Geographic Names

Camp "Kinderland" (Hopewell Junction, N.Y.)

Occupations

Choreographers
Dancers

Subjects

Dance -- Political aspects -- New York (State) -- New York
Dance for children

Names

Segal, Edith, 1902-
Federal Theatre Project (U.S.)
New Dance League
Unity House

Container List

Autobiographical Files

- b. 11 f. 1 1926-1978
Includes Segal's first contract signed by Ivan Tarasoff and Segal and labeled in her hand "first dance contract" as well as notes regarding Segal's earliest performance.
- b. 11 f. 2 Notes for Short Stories 1954-1961
- b. 11 f. 3 Oral History of Edith Segal by Paul Sporn 1979
- b. 11 f. 4 Recollections of 156 East Broadway 1983
- b. 11 f. 5 Copyright Documentation 1941-1980

Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1 Personal Correspondence 1957-1991
- b. 11 f. 6 Box 11 Folder 6 contains correspondence from the late 1950s to the early 1970s with other prominent contemporary authors, artists, and activists, including Martha Graham, Dr. Spock, Pete Seeger, Eleanor Roosevelt, Langston Hughes, Harry Golden, and Rockwell Kent.
- b. 11 f. 7 Dance Research Correspondence 1988-1996
- b. 11 f. 8 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing Correspondence 1964-2014

Teaching Files

- b. 1 f. 2-27 Choreography and Scripts 1943-1982

Dance Notes

- b. 1 f. 28 1925
- b. 2 f. 1-5 1920s-1940s
- b. 2 f. 6 Lenin Memorial Programs 1930, 1937
- b. 2 f. 7-15 Song and Dance Book 1949
- b. 2 f. 16 Workers Dance League 1932-1934

Camp Kinderland Files

- b. 3 f. 1-14 1935-1984
- b. 11 f. 9 New York State Investigation Files 1955
This file contains correspondence regarding the New York state investigation into leftist activities of performers and artists related to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations. This file includes Segal's subpoena to appear before New York investigative board for questioning.

Federal Theatre Project Files

- b. 3 f. 15-25 1934-1938, 1976
- b. 9 f. 2 1937-1938
- b. 11 f. 10 Correspondence 1936-1939
Includes correspondence from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Federal Theatre Project, and the Detroit Federal Theatre as well as Segal's United States Department of Labor identification card from 1936.

Photographs

Edith Segal Photographs

- b. 3 f. 26 1915-1918
- b. 4 f. 1-11 1921-1949
- b. 5 f. 1-9 1940-1954
- b. 6 f. 1-6 1949-1961
- b. 7 f. 1-7 1960-1991

Photographs (cont.)
Edith Segal Photographs (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 12 circa 1950s
 La Danza Moderna del Teatro Nacional de Cuba
 - b. 7 f. 8 1960-1963
 - o. 1 1960-1962
 Dance cage - flat file #263.
 - o. 2 1964
 Dance cage - flat file #263.
 - b. 9 f. 3 1960-1965
 - b. 11 f. 11 Dance Photographs circa 1915-1929
 - b. 11 f. 13 Programs
 Includes various programs from ballet, theatre, and memorials. The Mordkin Ballet program for the 1926-1927 season is inscribed to Segal by Mikhail Mordkin, Hilda Butsova, and Vera Nemtchinova.
- Tribute Albums
- b. 8 f. 1-5 1930s-1983
 - b. 9 f. 1 1952-1989
 - b. 10 f. 1 1977-1978