



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Lanie Robertson papers

1953-2002

*T-Mss 2002-006

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2013

Summary

Creator: Robertson, Lanie

Title: Lanie Robertson papers

Date: 1953-2002

Size: 9.53 linear feet (25 boxes)

Source: Donated by Lanie Robertson, 2002.

Abstract: Lanie Robertson (b. 1936) is an American playwright, actor, and educator. The Lanie Robertson papers, dating from 1953 to 2002, survey Robertson's playwriting career through scripts, correspondence, writings, and biographical, production, and publicity files. The majority of the collection pertains to Robertson's professional and academic achievements, though some personal correspondence is present.

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>

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio-visual material in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audio-visual material will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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Processing note: Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2013 Original order and folder titles, when present, were maintained.

Creator History

Dr. Lanie Douglas Robertson is an American playwright, actor, and educator. Born in Knoxville, Iowa in 1936, Robertson attended the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas from 1955 to 1957. He attended the Gene Frankel Theatre Workshop from 1959 to 1963 before receiving his M.A. from Temple University in 1969. His first production, *The Runneth Over Cup*, was produced at the University of Kansas during his attendance there in 1957. Many of his plays were produced in Philadelphia, where he also taught literature and play-writing at the Philadelphia College of Art during the 1970s.

Robertson has written over 30 plays for regional and Off-Broadway theater. The subject matter of his work reflects his interest in historical figures and history in general. *The Insanity of Mary Girard* (1976), *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* (1984), *Nasty Little Secrets* (1985), *Alfred Stieglitz Loves O'Keefe* (1988), and *Nobody Lonesome for Me* (1995) are among his better-known works. His plays have been produced in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, and in towns in Virginia, Alaska, and Maine. Internationally, his work has been produced in Canada, England, France, Australia, and Japan.

As of 2009, Robertson has worked for Abram's Artists Agency.

Scope and Content Note

The Lanie Robertson papers, dating from 1953 to 2002, survey Robertson's playwriting career through scripts, correspondence, writings, and biographical, production, and publicity files. The majority of the collection pertains to Robertson's professional and academic achievements, though some personal correspondence is present.

This collection holds 53 scripts written by Robertson. Scripts are generally clean, complete typescripts of plays. Some titles are represented through multiple script versions, sometimes written or edited several years apart. Robertson's revisiting of certain older titles is documented through his annotations on the scripts. While some of his early works from the 1950s are present, most of the scripts were written in the 1980s and 1990s. Among the titles are *The Tiger of Payare* (1957), *Stringbean* (1989), *Nazi Women* (1992), *A Penny for the Guy* (1992), *Nobody Lonesome for Me* (1995), and *Cannibal's Waltz* (1997). Titles for television include episodes of the series *Monsters*, and a script for "Red-Hot Rhythm and Blues," a special about Diana Ross.

Production files are arranged into two sets based on the creator of the files (either Robertson or his literary agent, Helen Merrill). Files compiled by Helen Merrill during her time as literary agent for Robertson hold correspondence, dramatic production contracts, royalty statements, invoices, theater programs, and newspaper clippings. These files document communication between theaters, producers, playwrights, and literary agents during preliminary stages of theater production. Correspondence pertains to rights ownership; projected costs of productions and orchestrations; option offers to produce Robertson's plays; and the sending and receiving of scripts for potential production or inclusion in festivals. Primary correspondents are Helen Merrill, regional theater producers and directors, and other literary agents. Plays represented through Merrill's files include *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* (1983), *A Penny for the Guy* (1992), and *Alfred Stieglitz Loves O'Keefe* (1988).

Lanie Robertson's production files contain material he gathered during the course of the productions of his plays. The files hold agreements, reviews, programs, script excerpts, rehearsal schedules, contact sheets, and correspondence. Multiple productions of a single title may be represented within a given

file. For example, the production file for *Nasty Little Secrets* holds material relating to both the 1998 Off-Broadway production and the 2000 production in Hollywood. Of note are files containing correspondence, programs, reviews, rehearsal schedules, and photographs relating to the Japanese production of Robertson's *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* (1994, Tokyo). Pre-production arrangements, such as casting and royalties arrangements, and box office reports from the Theater Tops in Tokyo, are documented.

Publicity files consist of theater programs, posters, reviews, and announcements for regional and Off-Broadway theater productions. Among the several productions represented are *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* (1983), *A Penny for the Guy* (1992), and *Bringing Mother Down* (1997).

Correspondence is both personal and professional in nature. Personal correspondence is almost exclusively from Robertson's parents dating from 1970 to 1975. The letters discuss general family events and document the support Robertson received from his family. Some letters and postcards from his friend, actor Craig Fols, are also present. Subjects of professional correspondence include contracts and agreements for plays written by Robertson, and sending and receiving scripts for general review and proposed productions. Many letters serve as agreements between Robertson and theaters for the production of his work.

Biographical material in this collection documents Robertson's personal interests and professional development and achievements. Material primarily consists of several versions of Robertson's curriculum vitae, biographical essays, and head-shots. A limited amount of teaching-related material, such as correspondence and contracts, is present. An incomplete scrapbook documents some of his early achievements and interests in theater, from the early 1950s to the 1970s, through newspaper clippings and programs. Material relating to his family is comprised of family photographs, Robertson's high school yearbook, and photographs and an essay for his father's obituary.

Writings in this collection document Robertson's academic and creative interests, such as literature and history, through notebooks, poetry, synopses, and notes and essays from Robertson's graduate school studies. The notebooks contain notes written during the 1970s when Robertson was in graduate school, and notes on his play *Nobody Lonesome for Me* (1995). A copy of his master's thesis is present, as well as files containing college exam essays and research material and notes on occult literature. Partial scripts and synopses for his plays can also be found here. The majority of the poetry was written by Robertson in 1968 while he was studying in London. The poetry reflects Robertson's interest in historical figures, such as Thomas More and Ben Jonson.

This collection holds audio-visual material relating to productions of plays written by Robertson. Inquiries regarding audio-visual material in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audio-visual material will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into 6 categories: scripts, production files, publicity files, correspondence, biographical material, and writings. Production files are subdivided into Helen Merrill files and Lanie Robertson files. Scripts and production files are arranged alphabetically by title of production or concept; all other groups are arranged chronologically.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence
Essays
Scripts (documents)

Occupations

Playwrights

Subjects

Theater -- United States

Container List

Scripts

- b. 1 f. 1 *AIDS Alive* 1988
- b. 1 f. 2 *Alfred Stieglitz Loves O'Keefe* 1997
- b. 1 f. 3 *Back Country Crimes* 1980
- b. 1 f. 4-5 *Birthday* 1957
- b. 1 f. 6 *Bogeyman* 1999
- b. 1 f. 7 *Bringing Mother Down* 1997
- b. 1 f. 8-10 *Cannibal's Waltz* 1997
- b. 1 f. 11 *The Case of the Shadowed Showgirl* 1990
- b. 1 f. 12 *Church Music: A Jim Play* 1998
- b. 1 f. 13 *Closing the Halls Where Once Fatima Stood* 1977
- b. 2 f. 1 *Commentaries on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* 1974
- b. 2 f. 2 *Dark Night at the Theatre* 1959
- b. 2 f. 3 *Easy Rider* 1999
- b. 2 f. 4-5 *Eddie Rex, Private Eye* 1987
- b. 2 f. 6 *Eugene O'Neill: Journey Toward Genius* 1987
- b. 2 f. 7 *An Evening with Eva Braun* 1991
- b. 2 f. 8-9 *Geographies of Northern Provinces* 1975
- b. 2 f. 10 *God's Game* 2001
- b. 2 f. 11 *The Gospel According to Magda Goebbels* 1991
- b. 2 f. 12-13 *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates* 2001-2002
- b. 3 f. 1 *Heart's Desire* 1985
- b. 3 f. 2 *Helga on the Beach* 1991
- b. 3 f. 3 *Hieroglyph* 1998
- b. 3 f. 4-5 *The Insanity of Mary Girard* 1976
- b. 3 f. 6 *Lady with the Moustache* 1995
- b. 3 f. 7-8 *Last Gas Till Turnpike* 1989
- b. 3 f. 9 *Last of the Red-Hot Poppas* 1983
- b. 4 f. 1 *Last of the Red-Hot Poppas* 1983
- b. 4 f. 2-3 *Love Sydney, "The Phantom Burglar"* 1987
- b. 4 f. 4 *Marking Time* 1997
- b. 4 f. 5-6 *The Mickey Mouse Murder Case* 1978-1979
- b. 4 f. 7 *A Miracle Out of Scripture (or Bringing Mother Down)* 1978
- b. 4 f. 8 *Nasty Little Secrets* 1997
- b. 5 f. 1-4 *Nazi Women* 1992-1994
- b. 5 f. 5-8 *Nobody Lonesome for Me* 1995
- b. 6 f. 1 *The Park Bench* 1974
- b. 6 f. 2-3 *A Penny for the Guy* 1992, 2001
- b. 6 f. 4 *The People vs. Mae West* 1999

Scripts (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 5 "Red-Hot Rhythm and Blues" 1987
Diana Ross television special
- b. 6 f. 6-7 Riff-Raff (or The Revolt of the Nubian Women) 1989
- b. 6 f. 8-9 *The Silver Skates* 1994
- b. 6 f. 10 "Sitters" 1988
Monsters television series
- b. 6 f. 11 "Something in the Pipes" 1988
Monsters television series
- b. 7 f. 1-3 *Stringbean* 1989-1991
- b. 7 f. 4 *The Tiger of Payare* 1957
- b. 7 f. 6-7 *The Trials of Mrs. Surratt* 1983
- b. 7 f. 8 *The Trials of Mrs. Surratt* 1994
- b. 7 f. 9 *Washington Revolting* 1973
- b. 8 f. 1 *Washington Revolting* 1973
- b. 8 f. 2 *What Does a Blind Leopard See?* 1971
- b. 8 f. 3-4 *What Does a Blind Leopard See?* 1982

Production Files

Helen Merrill Files

- b. 8 f. 5-13 *Alfred Steiglitz Loves O'Keefe* 1987-1998
- b. 9 f. 1 *Alfred Steiglitz Loves O'Keefe* 1989-1990
- b. 9 f. 2 *Cannibal's Waltz* 1993
- b. 9 f. 3 *Eclipsing Zero* 1984
- b. 9 f. 4 *Eddie Rex, Private Eye* 1987
- b. 9 f. 5-6 *Eugene O'Neill: Journey into Genius* 1987-1992
- b. 9 f. 7 *Harlem Suite* 1988-1989
- b. 9 f. 8-21 Lady Day at Emerson's Bar Grill 1983-1998
- b. 10 f. 1-13 Lady Day at Emerson's Bar Grill 1986-1998
- b. 10 f. 14-15 *Last Gas Till Turnpike* 1984-1990
- b. 10 f. 16-18 *Nasty Little Secrets* 1987-1989
- b. 10 f. 19-22 *A Penny for the Guy* 1992-1996
- b. 11 f. 1 *Stringbean* 1991
- b. 11 f. 2-3 *The Trials of Mrs. Surratt* 1985-1995
- b. 11 f. 4-13 Lanie Robertson-General Files 1985-1997

Lanie Robertson Files

- b. 11 f. 14 *AIDS Alive* 1988
- b. 11 f. 15-16 *Alfred Steiglitz Loves O'Keefe* 1987-1995
- b. 23 f. 2 *Alfred Steiglitz Loves O'Keefe*
Poster
- b. 12 f. 1-4 *Cannibal's Waltz* 1999
- b. 12 f. 5 Contact Sheets 1988-1994
- b. 12 f. 6 *Harlem Suite* 1988
- b. 12 f. 7 *The Insanity of Mary Girard* 1976

Production Files (cont.)
Lanie Robertson Files (cont.)

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar Grill

- b. 12 f. 8-9 1986-1989
- b. 13 f. 1-7 1986-2000
- b. 14 f. 1-5 1993-1997
Includes Japanese production
- b. 23 f. 1 1994
Poster
- b. 14 f. 6 *Last Gas Till Turnpike* 1984-1990
- b. 14 f. 7 "Red-Hot Rhythm and Blues" 1987
- b. 14 f. 8-9 *Nasty Little Secrets* 1989-2001
- b. 14 f. 10 *A Penny for the Guy* 1993-2000
- b. 15 f. 1 *Silver Skates* 1995-1996
- b. 24 *Silver Skates* 2002
Set designs
- b. 15 f. 2 *Stringbean* 1991
- b. 23 f. 5 *Stringbean* 1991
Plastic tie
- b. 15 f. 3 *Where Once Fatima Stood* 1978

Publicity Files

- b. 15 f. 4-8 1954-1988
- b. 16 f. 1-7 1976-2001
- b. 24 f. 2-4 1989-1998
Posters
- b. 17 f. 1-5 1996-2001

Correspondence

- b. 17 f. 6-7 1967-1977
- b. 18 f. 1-6 1970-2002

Biographical Material

- b. 18 f. 7 1953
- b. 22 f. 1 1956-1996
Scrapbook
- b. 23 f. 3-4 1998-2000
Collages made by casts of two productions of *Nasty Little Secrets*
- b. 19 f. 1-6 1968-2001
- b. 24 f. 1 1989-1990
Poster
- b. 25 f. 1 1998
Award

Writings

- b. 19 f. 7-14 1964-1968
- b. 20 f. 1-10 1968-1998

Writings (cont.)

b. 21 f. 1-2 1997-2001