



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Claire Luce papers**

1925-1987

\*T-Mss 1990-015

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** Luce, Claire

**Title:** Claire Luce papers

**Date:** 1925-1987

**Size:** 17.01 linear feet (46 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Jeanne Luce Selvin, 1990,1991.

**Abstract:** Claire Luce (1903 -1989) was an American stage and screen actress and dancer. The Claire Luce papers hold correspondence, theater and film files, scripts, photographs, writings, art, scrapbooks and memorabilia documenting the actress's career in dance, theater, film, and radio.

**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 materials in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division ([theatrediv@nypl.org](mailto:theatrediv@nypl.org)). Audio/visual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

## Creator History

Claire Luce (1903 -1989) was born in Syracuse, New York. In her teens she studied dance at the Denishawn School in New York City with Michel Fokine and Florence Colebrook Powers. In 1921, Luce made her professional debut dancing in Sol Hurok's Russian Opera Company. She starred in many Broadway plays and revues from 1923 until 1952, including *Irving Berlin's Music Box Revue* (1924) and the *Ziegfeld Follies* (1926). Her big break came when she co-starred with Fred Astaire in the original Broadway production of *Gay Divorce* (1932). During the London run of *Gay Divorce*, Luce suffered a serious injury to her hip that ended her stage dancing career. She had a brief career in Hollywood, starring in *Up the River* (1930). She also appeared in several British films.

She returned to the stage to star in *A Portrait in Black* (1938) and in the Broadway and London productions of *Of Mice and Men* (1937-1939). Luce often worked in London and remained there throughout the war years. She performed a number of Shakespearean roles during that time and in 1945 led the company at the Stratford-on-Avon Memorial Theatre's summer Shakespeare Festival as Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. During World War II she also toured with the Entertainments National Service Association, an organization established in 1939 by Basil Dean and Leslie Henson to provide entertainment for British armed forces personnel.

Luce continued to work in regional and summer stock theater throughout the 1950s and 1960s. She starred in *The Time of the Cuckoo* at several regional theaters from 1954-1956, and also appeared in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1966) and *In the Time of My Life* (1962).

In the 1960s, Luce put together a one-woman show (developed under various titles) in which she performed scenes of many of the great Shakespearean female characters. She was also an avid painter and had several solo shows. In 1965 she published a book, *Letters from Patrick - Letters of Life and Love from an R.A.F. Pilot-Bombardier to the American Actress, Claire Luce*. Luce retired in New York City, and was working on her autobiography at the time of her death in 1989.

## Scope and Content Note

The Claire Luce papers hold correspondence, theater and film files, scripts, photographs, writings, art, scrapbooks and memorabilia documenting Luce's career in dance, theater, film, and radio.

Correspondence is both personal and professional and includes letters from theater critic Phillip Page, Richard Churchill, friend "Gillo" Gillan, and love letters from Anthony Drexel Cassatt and Clifford Warren Smith.

Photographs consist of production shots, film stills, and fashion portraits of Luce as well as personal snapshots. Of note are Luce's fashion portraits, created by prominent photographers of the first half of the 20th century, including G. Maillard Kesslère, Lee Miller, Edward Thayer Monroe, and Hal Phylfe. Memorabilia holds travel items such as menus, guidebooks, luggage tags, and passenger lists, as well as pins and badges from the 1952 Eisenhower presidential campaign and personal items such as driver's licenses, awards, and membership cards.

Scripts consist of film sides, radio scripts, spoken word scripts, and theater production scripts. All are annotated and some include blocking diagrams. Scrapbooks are arranged by production or year, and hold reviews, magazine articles, and gossip columns that mention Luce or her co-stars. Theater files hold programs, contracts, congratulatory telegrams, and correspondence relating to individual productions. A few productions have costume pieces and props, including *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and two Ziegfeld revues. Film files are correspondence with Fox Movie Studios and publicist Jeannette Saure and an advertising spread for *Let's Make a Night of It*. Television files hold

contracts and correspondence regarding *Broadway Television Theater* and *Pastiche*.

Files documenting Luce's war work consist of correspondence from the Entertainments National Service Association arranging radio broadcasts and appearances. There are also letters documenting her involvement with the American Eagle Club and newsletters from the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. War work files also hold posters, flyers, and letters with various government authorities authorizing travel to France for troop entertainment.

Sheet music consists of music used by Luce in performance, as well as copies of *My Foolish Heart*, an original number composed by Luce in 1941. Teaching files document her time as a guest lecturer at New York University in 1966, as well as a course on Shakespeare at St. Paul's, and hold correspondence, class plans, and notes on student progress.

Writings are notes and drafts for *Letters from Patrick* and her unpublished autobiography, as well as her diaries. The diaries primarily date from the 1970s. Art consists of small canvases and charcoal and pastel sketches signed by Luce. These depict women and appear to be costume or character sketches. Audio recordings are rehearsals and performances of various iterations of her one-woman show (1958-1966) and dramatic readings.

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**Arrangement:** Alphabetical by file type.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

Acting -- Study and teaching  
Actresses  
Musicals  
Revue  
Theater -- Great Britain  
Theater -- United States  
World War, 1939-1945. -- War work  
Ziegfeld follies

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Artwork  
Correspondence  
Photographs  
Programs  
Scrapbooks

### Names

Entertainments National Service Association (Great Britain)

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-3 Art 1956-1970
- b. 39 f. 1-2 Art undated
- b. 43 f. 1 Art undated
- b. 1 f. 4 Contracts 1928-1966
- Correspondence
- By Date
- b. 1 f. 5-9 1924-1929
- b. 2 f. 1-9 1930-1938
- b. 3 f. 1-5 1938-1941
- b. 4 f. 1-6 1942-1949
- b. 5 f. 1-7 1950-1963
- b. 6 f. 1-5 1964-1970
- b. 7 f. 1-8 1971-1987
- By Individual
- b. 8 f. 1 Anglin, Margaret 1932-1935
- b. 8 f. 2 Cassatt, Anthony Drexel 1925-1926
- b. 8 f. 3-4 Churchill, Randolph 1935-1956
- b. 8 f. 5 Dowling, Eddie 1965
- b. 8 f. 6 Gillan, John W. "Gillo" 1937-1941
- b. 8 f. 7 Kinsella, Patrick undated
- b. 8 f. 8 Nikitina, Alice 1935-1970
- b. 9 f. 1-2 Page, Phillip 1939-1964
- b. 9 f. 3 Smith, Clifford Warren 1926-1932
- b. 9 f. 4 Ziegfeld, Florenz 1926
- b. 9 f. 5 *Film - Up the River* 1930
- b. 43 f. 2 *Film - Lets Make a Night of It* undated
- b. 10 f. 1-5 Memorabilia 1924-1955
- b. 39 f. 3-5 Memorabilia 1925-1930
- b. 43 f. 3 Memorabilia 1925-1930
- b. 46 Memorabilia 1957  
Humanitarian award from the Atlantic City Auxiliary.
- Photographs
- b. 39 f. 6-9 Fashion Portraits 1922-1940
- b. 11 f. 1-7 Fashion Portraits 1925-1960
- b. 43 f. 4-6 Fashion Portraits 1926-1939
- b. 40 f. 1-11 Fashion Portraits 1930-1951
- b. 41 f. 1-9 Fashion Portraits 1930-1951
- Others
- b. 41 f. 10 1925-1950

Photographs (cont.)

Others (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 8-9 Churchill, Randolph undated
- b. 12 f. 1 Gillan, John undated
- b. 41 f. 11 Gillan, John undated
- b. 41 f. 12 Luce, Polly undated
- b. 12 f. 2 Ripley, Bob undated
- b. 41 f. 13 Smith, Clifford Warren undated

Productions

- b. 12 f. 3 *Film - Over She Goes* 1936
- b. 12 f. 4 Television undated

Theater

- b. 12 f. 5 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1945
  - b. 42 f. 1 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1945
  - b. 12 f. 6 *Bell, Book and Candle* 1953
  - b. 12 f. 7 *Blithe Spirit* 1944
  - b. 12 f. 8 *Burlesque* 1928
  - b. 12 f. 9 *La Dame aux Camellias* undated
  - b. 12 f. 10 *The Devil also Dreams* undated
  - b. 12 f. 11 *A Doll's House* undated
  - b. 42 f. 2 *Follow the Sun* 1936
  - b. 12 f. 12 *Gay Divorce* 1933
  - b. 12 f. 13 *Golden Eagle* 1946
  - b. 12 f. 14 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1952
  - b. 12 f. 15 *Of Mice and Men* 1938
  - b. 42 f. 3 *Of Mice and Men* 1938
  - b. 12 f. 16 One-Woman Shows 1958-1966
  - b. 12 f. 17 *Portrait in Black* undated
  - b. 12 f. 18 *The Shanghai Gesture* 1955
  - b. 12 f. 19 *Society Girl* undated
  - b. 12 f. 20 *A Streetcar Named Desire* undated
  - b. 12 f. 21 *Suddenly Last Summer* undated
  - b. 12 f. 22 *The Taming of the Shrew* 1951
  - b. 12 f. 23 Unidentified 1930-1965
  - b. 41 f. 14 Unidentified 1930-1965
  - b. 12 f. 24 *Vanity Fair* 1946
  - b. 12 f. 25 *Washington Square* undated
  - b. 42 f. 4-7 Ziegfeld productions 1925-1927
- Snapshots
- b. 12 f. 26-27 1925-1940
  - b. 42 f. 8 1925-1950
  - b. 13 f. 1-8 1935-1970
  - b. 13 f. 9-10 War Effort 1939-1945

### Scrapbooks

- b. 30 1925-1934  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,650
- b. 31 1926-1930  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,648
- b. 32 1926-1930  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,648
- b. 33 1930-1934  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,649
- b. 43 f. 7 1930-1941  
Loose pages
  
- b. 34 1933-1934  
*Gay Divorce*
  
- b. 34 1934-1935  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,647
- b. 35 1934-1936  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,651
- b. 36 1935-1936
- b. 36 1937-1938  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,646
- b. 37 1943-1948
- b. 38 1949-1957  
MWEZ + n.c. 21,645

### Scripts

- b. 14 f. 1 Radio 1945
- b. 14 f. 2 Spoken Word Albums undated
- b. 14 f. 3-6 Television 1954-1966
- b. 15 f. 1-3 Television 1954-1966
- Theater undated
- b. 15 f. 4-6 A-G
- b. 16 f. 1-8 L-S
- b. 17 f. 1-5 T-V
- b. 18 f. 1-3 W
- b. 18 f. 4 Sheet Music undated
- b. 18 f. 5 *Songwriting - My Foolish Heart* 1941
- b. 42 f. 9 *Songwriting - My Foolish Heart* 1941

### Teaching

- b. 18 f. 6-8 New York University 1965
- b. 19 f. 1-2 Shakespeare at St. Pauls 1967
- b. 19 f. 3-6 Television 1948-1955

### Theater

- b. 19 f. 7 *And So, Farewell* 1958
- b. 19 f. 8-9 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1945

Theater (cont.)

- b. 45 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1945  
Skirt, belt, and collar worn as Cleopatra.
- Restricted. Access by appointment only.
- b. 19 f. 10 *Blithe Spirit* 1944
- b. 19 f. 11 *Burlesque* 1928
- b. 19 f. 12 *Casino de Paris* 1925
- b. 19 f. 13 *Dear Liar* 1972
- b. 19 f. 14 *Follow the Sun* 1936
- b. 20 f. 1 *La Fiesta* 1973
- b. 43 f. 8 *La Fiesta* 1973 (poster)
- b. 20 f. 2 Galas and Benefits 1929-1964
- b. 20 f. 3 *Garden District* 1959
- b. 20 f. 4 *Gay Deceivers* 1935
- b. 20 f. 5 *Gay Divorce* 1933-1934
- b. 20 f. 6 *Georges Jean* 1974
- b. 20 f. 7 *Golden Eagle* 1946
- b. 20 f. 8 *In the Time of My Life* 1962
- b. 20 f. 9 *Irving Berlin's Music Box Revue* 1924-1925
- b. 42 f. 10 *Irving Berlin's Music Box Revue* 1924-1925
- b. 20 f. 10 *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* 1966
- b. 46 *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* 1966  
Costume jewelry worn in the production.
- Restricted. Access by appointment only.
- b. 20 f. 11 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1954
- b. 44 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1954  
Shoes worn as Beatrice.
- Restricted. Access by appointment only.
- b. 20 f. 12 *Music Hall* 1962
- b. 20 f. 13 *No Sleep for the Wicked* 1937
- b. 20 f. 14 *Of Mice and Men* 1938
- b. 21 f. 1-4 One-Woman Shows 1958-1966
- b. 42 f. 11-13 One-Woman Shows 1958-1966
- b. 21 f. 5 *Othello* 1948
- b. 21 f. 6 *Paris en Fête!* 1925
- b. 21 f. 7 *Portrait in Black* 1947
- b. 21 f. 8 *Rain* 1940
- b. 21 f. 9 *Seven Scenes for Yeni* 1963
- b. 21 f. 10 *Shanghai Gesture* 1955
- b. 21 f. 11 *Society Girl* 1931

Theater (cont.)

- b. 21 f. 12 *The Taming of the Shrew* 1941
- b. 21 f. 13 *Tennessee Williams and Friends* 1968-1969
- b. 21 f. 14 *The Time of the Cuckoo* 1954-1956
- b. 21 f. 15 *Twelfth Night* 1972  
As director
  
- b. 21 f. 16 *Vanity Fair* 1946
  - b. 43 f. 9 *Vanity Fair* 1946 (posters)
- b. 21 f. 17 *Vintage Wine* 1934
- b. 21 f. 18 *The Waves* 1964
- b. 21 f. 19 *The Wedding* 1966
- b. 21 f. 20 *The Women* 1966
- b. 21 f. 21 *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running* 1972
- b. 42 f. 14 *Ziegfeld Follies* 1926-1927  
Alternate title: *No Foolin'*.
  - b. 44 *Ziegfeld Follies* 1926  
Shoes worn during Luce's *Dans la Boule Lumineuse* number.
  
- Restricted. Access by appointment only.
- b. 42 f. 15 *Ziegfeld's Palm Beach Nights* 1925
  - b. 45 *Ziegfeld's Palm Beach Nights* 1925  
Suede skirt and tomahawk prop used during Luce's *Broadway Indian* number.

Restricted. Access by appointment only.

- b. 22 f. 1-4 *War Work* 1939-1945
- b. 43 f. 10 *War Work* 1939-1945  
*The Taming of the Shrew* with the Royal Air Force signed posters.

Writings

Diaries

- b. 22 f. 5-6 1931, 1933
  - b. 23 f. 1 1934
  - b. 23 f. 2 1939
  - b. 23 f. 3 1965
- b. 23 f. 4-7 1970-1972
- b. 24 f. 1-5 1972-1977
  - b. 25 f. 1 1980s
- b. 25 f. 2-5 Drafts undated
- b. 26 f. 1-5 Drafts undated
- b. 27 f. 1-9 Drafts undated
- b. 28 f. 1-6 Notes undated
- b. 29 f. 1-4 Notes undated