



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Bernard Sobel papers

1823-1965 [bulk 1901-1965]

*T-Mss 2012-071

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2014

Summary

Creator: Sobel, Bernard, 1936-

Title: Bernard Sobel papers

Date: 1823-1965 [bulk 1901-1965]

Size: 5.35 linear feet (13 boxes, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Donated by Lorraine Sobel Lee, 1964.

Abstract: Bernard Sobel (1887-1964) was an American author and theatrical press agent. His papers include drafts, notes, research materials, and other unidentified papers relating to Sobel's writing; correspondence; photographs; notebooks; a diary; and other personal items.

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>

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Related Materials:

Bernard Sobel papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Bernard Sobel Papers. The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Creator History

Bernard Sobel was born on March 13, 1887 in Attica, Indiana, and grew up in Lafayette, Indiana. He majored in English at Purdue University, graduating in 1911 and going on to be a Modern Drama instructor. While teaching at Purdue, he spent his spare time writing plays and working as a publicist for local theatres.

Sobel moved to New York, became a press agent for the well-known theatrical producer Earl Carroll, and established himself as a fixture in the New York theatre world. As a press agent he worked for Charles Dillingham, A. L. Erlanger, Paramount Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, and United Artists; and spent many years working as a press agent for the legendary impresario Florenz Ziegfeld. He was also the drama critic for the New York Mirror and an active member of The Lambs Club.

Sobel continued to write short plays and stories throughout his life, and he published a memoir, *Broadway Heartbeat: Memoirs of a Press Agent* (1953). He published one novel, *The Indiscreet Girl* (1933); and *Three Plays* (1913), a collection of the dramatic works *Jennie Knows*, *Mrs. Brompton's Dinner Party*, and *There's Always a Reason*. His non-fiction works include *Burleycue: An Underground History of Burlesque Days* (1931), *A Pictorial History of Burlesque* (1956), and *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville* (1961). He edited *The Theatre Handbook and Digest of Plays* (1940) and *The New Theatre Handbook and Digest of Plays* (1959). Shorter pieces by Sobel appeared in *Saturday Review*, *Theatre Arts*, *Variety*, and *Esquire*.

For many years Sobel lived with his sister, Lorraine Sobel Lee. He died in New York, New York on March 12, 1964.

Scope and Content Note

Writings document Sobel's non-fiction works, short stories, one-act plays, and reviews. The non-fiction works included here are Sobel's published books *Broadway Heartbeat: Memoirs of a Press Agent*, *A Pictorial History of Burlesque*, and *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville*; as well as the unpublished *How to Teach Yourself* and untitled surveys of actors, actresses and the acting profession; and romantic love in theory, art, and history. Files on these works consist of incomplete drafts, notes, fragments, and excerpts. Research files for Sobel's books, such as clippings, handbills, and programs, are also included here. Sobel's short stories and one-act plays are represented with typed drafts and handwritten notes. One scrapbook contains reviews written by Sobel as a drama critic for the New York Mirror. The majority of Sobel's writings are undated.

Other personal professional files include correspondence, one diary, notebooks, photographs, and other personal items. Sobel's career as Florenz Ziegfeld's press agent is covered with many long telegrams from Ziegfeld containing day-to-day instructions on Sobel's publicity operations. One folder contains condolence telegrams and letters sent to Sobel's sister, Lorraine Lee, after his death. A small amount of personal correspondence consists mainly of postcards from Europe, sent by Sobel to his sister, and postcards sent to Sobel and Lee by various friends. Many letters from notable theatrical personalities discuss Sobel and his correspondents' lives and careers. There are several letters from Ziegfeld's widow, the actress Billie Burke, including a beautiful letter, discussing Ziegfeld's legacy and their daughter Patricia. A 1901 diary contains notes from the fourteen year old Sobel on his daily activities and occasional sketches. There are two notebooks on the topics of French Drama and American Drama, probably from Sobel's time as an instructor at Purdue University. This collection includes one folder of photographs, consisting of portraits of Sobel; candid shots of him and friends, usually out at nightclubs; and portraits and performance photographs of theatre and vaudeville stars.

Key Terms

Occupations

Authors
Historians
Playwrights
Press agents
Publicists
Writers

Subjects

Burlesque (Theater) -- United States -- History
Love -- History
Theater -- 20th century -- History and criticism
Vaudeville -- History and criticism

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Diaries
Photographs
Scripts

Names

Ziegfeld, Flo, 1869-1932

Container List

Writings 1933-1956, undated

Books 1950, 1956, undated

- b. 1 f. 1 Actors and Acting
 - b. 1 f. 2 Burlesque Project 1950
 - o. 1 Burlesque Project 1956
Location: LPA Mapcase C12, Drawer #18
 - b. 1 f. 2-6 Love
 - b. 2 f. 1-3 Love
 - b. 2 f. 4 *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville*
 - b. 3 f. 1-5 *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville*
 - b. 4 f. 1-5 *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville*
 - b. 5 f. 1-2 *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville*
 - b. 5 f. 3 *Teach Yourself*
 - b. 5 f. 4 *Ziegfeld and Me*
 - b. 6 f. 1-3 *Ziegfeld and Me*
 - b. 7 f. 1-2 *Ziegfeld and Me*
- Short Stories and One-Act Plays 1944, 1947, undated
- b. 7 f. 3 2 A. M
 - b. 7 f. 4 3:30 PM
 - b. 7 f. 5 Alone
 - b. 7 f. 6 *American Record*
 - b. 7 f. 7 *The American Revue*
 - b. 7 f. 8 *Another Call*
 - b. 7 f. 9 *Another Necklace*
 - b. 7 f. 10 *Appart*
 - b. 7 f. 11 *Azelia*
 - b. 7 f. 12 *Bedelia -- The Girl with the Knife*
 - b. 8 f. 1 *Behind the Picture*
 - b. 8 f. 2 *Between Stations*
 - b. 8 f. 3 *Bread Upon the Waters*
 - b. 8 f. 4 *Broadway*
 - b. 8 f. 5 *Bottoms Up!*
 - b. 8 f. 6 *Byron*
 - b. 8 f. 7 *Catching Charly*
 - b. 8 f. 8 *Cheer Up!*
 - b. 8 f. 9 Claire Luce Story
 - b. 8 f. 10 *Confessions of a Crossword Puzzle Addict*
 - b. 8 f. 11 *Conquest*
 - b. 8 f. 12 *Elise Harbor*
 - b. 8 f. 13 *Emotional Juggler*

Writings (cont.)

Short Stories and One-Act Plays (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 14 *Expurgated?*
- b. 8 f. 15 *Face Value*
- b. 8 f. 16 *A Family Affair*
- b. 8 f. 17 *Found Dead*
- b. 8 f. 18 *From Nine to Five*
- b. 8 f. 19 *Golf Story*
- b. 8 f. 20 *Hands*
- b. 8 f. 21 *He or Another* 1944
- b. 8 f. 22 *He Thought Double*
- b. 8 f. 23 *Hellcat*
- b. 8 f. 24 *How Gordon Arrived*
- b. 8 f. 25 *How It Happened*
- b. 8 f. 26 *How Love Broke into Print*
- b. 9 f. 1 *How to Combat Anti-Semitism in America*
- b. 9 f. 2 *I Brought 'Em Up*
- b. 9 f. 3 *The Immortal*
- b. 9 f. 4 *In the Box Office*
- b. 9 f. 5 *Jackson and Eloise*
- b. 9 f. 6 *Kissed*
- b. 9 f. 7 *The Last Shriek*
- b. 9 f. 8 *Leonora*
- b. 9 f. 9 *Let Me In*
- b. 9 f. 10 *The Littlest One*
- b. 9 f. 11 *Long Live Princesses*
- b. 9 f. 12 *A Lunch Foursome*
- b. 9 f. 13 *Making Your Own*
- b. 9 f. 14 *Mrs. Jenkins Kirkpathugh*
- b. 9 f. 15 *Mrs. Panko*
- b. 9 f. 16 *Near-Nude Metamorphosis*
- b. 9 f. 17 *The Necklaces and Murder Omnibus*
- b. 9 f. 18 *On the Margins*
- b. 9 f. 19 *Out at Lunch*
- b. 9 f. 20 *Out of Character*
- b. 9 f. 21 *Papa and the Girls*
- b. 9 f. 22 *The Parrot*
- b. 9 f. 23 *Personal Postscript*
- b. 9 f. 24 *Photograph Story*
- b. 9 f. 25 *Please Respond*
- b. 9 f. 26 *Poison Pen*
- b. 9 f. 27 *Portrait of a Circus Lady*
- b. 9 f. 28 *The Prince and the Clock*

Writings (cont.)

Short Stories and One-Act Plays (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 29 *Pursuing*
- b. 9 f. 30 *Pursuit*
- b. 9 f. 31 *Rather Awkward*
- b. 9 f. 32 *Remembering Eyes* 1947
- b. 9 f. 33 *Roger Martin*
- b. 9 f. 34 *Second Love*
- b. 9 f. 35 *Seeing is Believing*
- b. 10 f. 1 *The Shifting Imasse*
- b. 10 f. 2 *Some Red Roses*
- b. 10 f. 3 *The Spider Web*
- b. 10 f. 4 *Stairway to Death*
- b. 10 f. 5 *Stanley Ridgeway*
- b. 10 f. 6 *The Star of the Demise of Burlesque or How a Headline Brings Down an Industry*
- b. 10 f. 7 Story about Father
- b. 10 f. 8 *Strictly Conventional*
- b. 10 f. 9 *Strictly Socratic*
- b. 10 f. 10 *Substitutes for Love*
- b. 10 f. 11 *Suffrage*
- b. 10 f. 12 *Swing Quartet / String Quartet*
- b. 10 f. 13 *Tables for Ladies*
- b. 10 f. 14 *The Tantalizing Ladder*
- b. 10 f. 15 *Theatrical Firsts*
- b. 10 f. 16 *There's Always a Reason*
- b. 10 f. 17 *Twin Bracelets*
- b. 10 f. 18 *The Two Judges*
- b. 10 f. 19 *Vive America*
- b. 10 f. 20 *What They Said*
- b. 10 f. 21 When Parrots
- b. 10 f. 22 *Which Floor, Please?* 1944
- b. 10 f. 23 *Which is Which?*
- b. 10 f. 24 *Woman's Hidden Charm*
- b. 10 f. 25 *Working Happily Together*
- b. 10 f. 26 *Ziegfeld Girl*
- Reviews 1933
- b. 10 f. 27 1933
- b. 11 f. 1-2 1933-1960
- b. 11 f. 3-6 Unidentified Writings
 - b. 12 f. 1 Articles of Agreement - Theatre Royal, Covent Garden 1823
 - b. 12 f. 2 Artwork undated
 - b. 12 f. 3 Awards and Honors 1945, 1960

- b. 12 f. 4 **Biography and Draft Card 1917-1942**
Correspondence 1920-1965
- b. 12 f. 5-7 **1920-1939**
Contains telegrams from Florenz Ziegfeld.
- b. 12 f. 8-9 **1940-1959**
Contains letters from Billie Burke, Shirley Booth, and Edna Ferber.
- b. 12 f. 10-11 **1960-1965, undated**
Contains letters from Brooks Atkinson, S. N. Behrman, Billie Burke, Bosley Crowther, Horton Foote, Howard Lindsay, and Cornelia Otis Skinner.

- b. 13 f. 1 **Diary 1901**
- b. 13 f. 2 **Expense Reports 1949**
- b. 13 f. 3 **Lambs Club Publications 1963**
- b. 13 f. 4 **Notebooks 1919, 1920**
- b. 13 f. 5 **Photographs undated**
- b. 13 f. 6 **Purdue University Alumni Magazine 1918**