



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**New Theatre League records**

1932-1942

\*T-Mss 1944-003

Processed by Elisabeth Elkind.

## Summary

**Creator:** New Theatre League

**Title:** New Theatre League records

**Date:** 1932-1942

**Source:** Records: Transfer?, Manuscripts Division

**Abstract:** The New Theatre League, a national non-profit federation of little theaters and amateur theatrical groups, was organized in 1935 to stimulate the writing and production of progressive social drama. The collection contains administrative files of the Play Department.

**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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**Preferred citation:** New Theatre League Records, \*T-Mss 1944-033, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

**Processing note:** Processed by Elisabeth Elkind.

## Creator History

The New Theatre League, a national non-profit federation of little theaters and amateur theatrical groups, was organized in 1935 to stimulate the writing and production of progressive social drama. It was both a publisher and a producer of plays promoting the aims of organized labor and peace and against racial discrimination and oppression. Its annual play contests led to the discovery and

sponsorship of Clifford Odets who won for *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935, Irwin Shaw, 1936 winner, with *Bury the Dead*, Marc Blitzstein who won in 1937 with *The Cradle Will Rock* and Ben Bengal, 1938 winner, with *Plant in the Sun*. Through its schools across the United States, the League sought to train actors, directors, technicians, playwrights, teachers and theater organizers to build a people's theater.

### **Custodial History**

This small collection may have found its way to the Billy Rose Theatre Division in a transfer from the Manuscripts Division of the New York Public Library because the latter retains a much larger portion of the records of the New Theatre League. Their material was a gift of the Jefferson School Library in 1944.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The collection contains administrative files of the Play Dept.: primarily correspondence, financial papers concerning royalty payments and publicity for its play contests; and manuscripts: scripts, songs and reports. There is a small amount of printed material, mostly from related organizations. The collection reflects the concerns and the workings of the New Theatre League.

**Arrangement:** Series I: Administrative Files Series II: Manuscripts Sub-series 1 - Reports Sub-series 2 - Scripts Sub-series 3 - Songs Series III: Printed Materials, mostly from related organizations

### **Key Terms**

#### **Subjects**

Peace movements -- United States  
Theater -- United States -- Political aspects  
Workers' theater -- United States  
Working class -- Songs and music  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Theater and the war

#### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scripts  
Songs

#### **Geographic Names**

United States -- Social conditions -- 1933-1945

#### **Names**

New Theatre League

## Container List

### Series I: Administrative Files ca. 1935-1937 (11 folders)

This series consists of correspondence reflecting the workings of the Play Dept. including letters on its publication plans, invoices with accompanying correspondence concerning royalty payments, and publicity and correspondence concerning the play contests it sponsored. It also contains a small amount of minutes of meetings, general press releases and publicity, sample contracts and forms, lists of plays in their catalog, a notebook of titles borrowed, address lists of members and organizations, and miscellaneous notes.

- b. 1 f. 1 **Correspondence** ca. 1938-1942 (1 folder)  
Correspondence, mostly incoming, of the New Theatre League's Play Dept.
- b. 1 f. 2 **Correspondence** 1939-1942 (1 folder)  
Invoices with accompanying correspondence mostly concerns royalty fees for plays controlled by the New Theatre League.
- b. 1 f. 3 **Contracts** 1936-1938 (1 folder)  
Contracts and other papers are for the play contests sponsored by the New Theatre League.
- b. 1 f. 4 **Minutes** 1940 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 5 **Press releases and other publicity** ca. 1935-1948 (1 folder)  
Press releases and a copy of *New Theatre News* reflect the work of the New Theatre League.
- b. 1 f. 6 **Contracts** (1 folder)  
Sample contracts [n.d.] and a copy of the playreader's report form.
- b. 1 f. 7 **Play lists** ca. 1938-1941 (1 folder)  
Catalogs and other lists of plays for the titles for which the New Theatre League acted as publisher or agent.
- b. 1 f. 8 **Record of titles borrowed** 1938 (1 folder)  
Notebook pages list play titles checked out and returned. Includes borrower's name.
- b. 1 f. 9 **Address lists** 1940 (1 folder)  
Address lists [n.d.] for individuals and membership cards [1940].
- b. 1 f. 10 **Address lists** 1936 (1 folder)  
Handwritten address lists for organizations.
- b. 1 f. 11 **Notes** ca. 1938-1941 (1 folder)

### Series II: Manuscripts ca. 1932-1942 (26 folders)

This series is predominately scripts and songs submitted to the New Theatre League, but also contains a few reports pertaining to the organization.

#### Sub-series 1- Reports ca. 1940 (5 folders)

This sub-series consists of typescript reports on the movement for a progressive theater and New Theatre League conventions and proposals. Includes an "Outline for a Negro Peoples' Theatre Musical Revue," by Ben Irwin; reflections of Powell Lindsay, an African American playwright, on a League convention; a report to the Trade Union Drama Group Directors by Kurt Keller; a report on the new theatre movement by Ralph Morrison; and a proposal for a New Theatre School.

- b. 1 f. 12 **Outline for a Negro Peoples' Theatre Musical Revue / Ben Irwin** (1 folder)  
Typescript [copy, n.d.] outlining a proposed show.
- b. 1 f. 13 **Report to the Trade Union Drama Group Directors / Kurt Keller** November 29, 1940 (1 folder)  
Typescript report on repertoire has some handwritten revisions.

Series II: Manuscripts (cont.)

Sub-series 1- Reports (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 14 *Reflections on the New Theatre League Convention / Powell Lindsay* (1 folder)  
Typescript [n.d.] with a few handwritten revisions is by Powell Lindsay, a delegate from the Negro Playwrights' Company of Harlem who attended the convention in Philadelphia.

- b. 1 f. 15 *New Theatres / Ralph Morrison* (1 folder)  
Typescript [n.d.] was written during World War II.

- b. 1 f. 16 *Manuscript / New Theatre League* (1 folder)  
Typescript manuscript [n.d.] heavily revised in pencil is on new theatre schools. Author unknown.

Sub-series 2 - Scripts ca. 1941-1942 (12 folders)

This sub-series consists of short scripts, mostly typescript, received by the Play Dept. of the New Theatre League. Includes scripts by Studs Terkel. It does not include any of the winning entries in the annual play contests.

- b. 1 f. 17 *The letter / Barbara Corcoran* 1941 (1 folder)  
Typescript with handwritten revisions for a play in one scene. Includes an accompanying note.

- b. 1 f. 18 *Give me a hit on the head / Otto Fleckless* 1942 (1 folder)  
Bengal, Ben  
Typescript skit with accompanying letter to Ben Bengal of the New Theatre League.

- b. 1 f. 19 *Chin up and shoulders to the wheel / Mark Hess* (1 folder)  
Typescript monolog [n.d.].

- b. 1 f. 20 *The radiotic hour / Kurt Keller* (1 folder)  
Typescript [n.d.] of a farce in two scenes, "written before the war."

- b. 1 f. 21 *"Take a poem, Miss Jenkins!" / Alan Max* (1 folder)  
Photocopied typescript [n.d.] with some handwritten revisions for a scene.

- b. 1 f. 22 *Tabloid Reds / Paul Peters* (1 folder)  
Sklar, George, 1908-1988  
Two versions of a photocopied typescript [n.d.] by Peters and George Sklar.

- b. 1 f. 23 *Statement / Ben Ruskin* 1941 (1 folder)  
Typescript with handwritten revisions and accompanying correspondence.

- b. 1 f. 24 *Babes in the Russian woods / Larry Shapiro* (1 folder)  
Handwritten scene [n.d.] between Hitler and Goering.

- b. 1 f. 25 *Scripts / Studs Terkel* (1 folder)  
Typescript scripts and song lyrics [n.d.] written or adapted by Studs Terkel for the Chicago Repertory Group on the war and civil defense during span class="topic">World War II/span>.

- b. 1 f. 26 *Cocky in khaki / Sonny Vale* (1 folder)  
Typescript [n.d.] written during World War II for the Chicago Repertory Group.

- b. 1 f. 27 *Anonymous scripts* 1941 (1 folder)  
Typescript scripts [most n.d.], some with handwritten revisions, no authors given, are on issues of oppressed workers or issues of World War II.

- b. 1 f. 28 *Script fragments* (1 folder)  
Partial scripts [n.d.], typescript with some handwritten revisions, were submitted to the New Theatre League.

Sub-series 3 - Songs ca. 1932-1941 (9 folders)

This sub-series contains typescript lyrics, handwritten and printed sheet music and correspondence, draft table of contents and publisher's dummy for a trade union songbook.

Series II: Manuscripts (cont.)

Sub-series 3 - Songs (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 1     **Lyrics / Lewis Allan** (1 folder)  
Typescript song lyrics and one scene [n.d.] with an accompanying letter.
- b. 2 f. 2     **Lyrics / Marvin Lipsitz**  
Typescript song lyrics [n.d.] on World War II topics written for the Chicago Repertory Group. The New Theatre League handled the royalty payments.
- b. 2 f. 3     **Lyrics** ca. 1941 (1 folder)  
Mostly anonymous typescript song lyrics.
- b. 2 f. 4     **Sheet music** (1 folder)  
Notebook [n.d.] handwritten in pencil of music for labor songs with some lyrics included. Some of the songs are attributed to Woody [Guthrie] and Pete [Seeger].
- b. 2 f. 5     **Sheet music** ca. 1941 (1 folder)  
Loose sheet music for labor songs, some with lyrics.
- b. 2 f. 6     **Sheet music** 1932-1940 (1 folder)  
Printed sheet music of labor songs.
- b. 2 f. 7     **Correspondence / Guy Barker, Jr.** 1941 (1 folder)  
Letters by Guy Barker of the 44th Street Bookfair are mostly to songwriters concerning the planned publication of a union songbook.
- b. 2 f. 8     **Publishing materials** (1 folder)  
Publisher's dummy, table of contents, and list of songs with their sources reflect the process of publishing a union songbook.

**Series III: Printed Materials (mostly from related organizations)** ca. 1933-1942 (2 folders)

This series contains programs, publicity and pamphlets from other political organizations including the American Peace Mobilization, the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, the International Workers Order and the National Negro Congress. Of interest is a reprint of a speech given by Theodore Ward at the opening of the Negro Playwrights' Theatre in Harlem in 1940. The series also contains a few miscellaneous clippings.

- b. 2 f. 9     **Printed material** ca. 1940 (1 folder)  
Printed material is from other political organizations. Much of it concerns efforts to maintain peace in the early days of World War II.
- b. 2 f. 10    **Miscellaneous clippings** ca. 1933-1942 (1 folder)  
A few miscellaneous clippings that were found with the other New Theatre League records.