

The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Lincoln Kirstein papers

1951-1999

(S) *MGZMD 253

Compiled by Maggie Long, Palmer School of Library and Information Science, class of 2011, June 2011

Summary

Creator: Kirstein, Lincoln, 1907-1996

Title: Lincoln Kirstein papers, 1951-1999

Size: .42 linear foot (1 box)

Source: Gift of Alexander Yow, 2011

Abstract: This collection contains personal letters from Lincoln Kirstein to Robert Harris Chapman and to Alexander Jensen Yow. It also includes a typescript of a play, *Magic Carpet*, written by Lincoln Kirstein in 1967 and several photographs of the Kirstein family.

Access: To request materials, please contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division (dance@nypl.org) in advance.

Preferred citation: Lincoln Kirstein papers, 1951-1999, (S) *MGZMD 253, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note

The collection was rehoused and a finding aid was created. No materials were discarded or transferred.

Related collections

Lincoln Kirstein papers, 1913-1994. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Lincoln Kirstein papers, 1914-1991. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Creator history

Lincoln Edward Kirstein (1907-1996) was born on May 4, 1907 in Rochester, New York and educated at Harvard College (A.B. 1929, A.M. 1930). In 1934, he co-founded the School of American Ballet with George Balanchine and Edward M.M. Warburg. He also participated in the founding and/or direction of the American Ballet Company in 1935, Ballet Caravan 1936-1941, and the Ballet Society in 1946, and he became general director of the succeeding company, New York City Ballet, in 1948. Kirstein married Fidelma Cadmus, sister of artist Paul Cadmus, in 1941 and served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1945. His career included work with visual artists and writers on various projects, and his dance-related publications include: *Dance Index*; books on Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, and the New York City

Ballet; a history of theatrical dance; and writing assistance to Romola Nijinsky on a biography of her husband. He retired from New York City Ballet and School of American Ballet in 1989. The recipient of many distinguished awards, Lincoln Kirstein died on January 5, 1996.

Robert Harris Chapman (1919-2000) graduated from Princeton University in 1941. He returned to Princeton as an instructor in the Department of English in 1946, after serving in the U.S. Navy as a Lieutenant in naval intelligence in Europe and North Africa. In 1948, Chapman accepted a position in the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of California, Berkeley, where he taught until 1950. That year, he accepted a position at Harvard University, where he taught English for almost four decades. Chapman was also named the first director of the Harvard's Loeb Drama Center in 1960, upon the recommendation of Harvard alumnus Lincoln Kirstein. He retired from Harvard in 1989 and moved to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Robert Harris Chapman died in 2000, at the age of 81.

Alexander Jensen Yow worked as a conservator at the Morgan Library in New York from the 1950s to the 1970s, and he established his own practice in semi-retirement after leaving his post at the Morgan. He was often referred to as "Jens" or "Jen" by his friends. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection holds a photographic portrait of Yow by George Platt Lynes, ca. 1948. Biographical information about Yow is relatively scarce.

Scope and content note

This collection contains personal letters from Lincoln Kirstein to Robert Harris Chapman and to Alexander Jensen Yow. It also includes a typescript of a play, *Magic Carpet*, written by Kirstein in 1967 and several photographs of the Kirstein family.

Kirstein's letters to Chapman and Yow comprise the bulk of the collection. His letters to Chapman, written between 1949 and 1993, focus on professional concerns, including his thoughts on the work of choreographer George Balanchine and on Chapman's work as a playwright and drama teacher at Harvard. Chapman taught and advised undergraduates, including actors Tommy Lee Jones and John Lithgow, playwright Arthur Kopit, and directors Peter Sellars and André Gregory, and some letters refer to these students.

Kirstein's letters to Yow were written between 1950 and 1975 and are much more personal in nature, reflecting the closeness of their relationship. Kirstein wrote to Yow from many of the places he traveled for work. Enclosed among his letters to Yow are four letters from John S. Thacher, written in 1951.

Photographs in the collection are primarily portraits of Kirstein's family, including a portrait of his father taken by George Platt Lynes and photographs of Kirstein and his mother taken at a summer resort.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged by format.

Key terms

Subjects

Ballet -- History -- 20th century
Ballet -- United States

Names

Balanchine, George
Chapman, Robert Harris
Kirstein, Lincoln, 1907-1996

Lithgow, John, 1945-
Lynes, George Platt, 1907-1955
New York City Ballet
Yow, Alexander Jensen

Special formats

Photographs

Container list

Correspondence, 1949-1999

- b.1 f.1-3 Lincoln Kirstein to Robert Chapman, 1949-1993
- b.1 f.4 Lincoln Kirstein to Alexander Jensen Yow, 1950-1975
Includes four letters from John S. Thacher to Kirstein and Yow.
- b.1 f.5 Robert Chapman to Alexander Jensen Yow, 1999
- b.1 f.6 Play--*Magic Carpet* by Lincoln Kirstein, 1967
- b.1 f.7 Photographs--Family, undated