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Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Ruth Moesel collection of Ruth Chatterton materials

1909-1974

*T-Mss 1984-008

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, August 2012

Summary

Creator: Moesel, Ruth

Title: Ruth Moesel collection of Ruth Chatterton materials, 1909-1974

Size: 16.12 linear feet (40 boxes)

Source: Donated by Ruth Moesel

Abstract: Ruth Chatterton (1893-1961) was an American actress, novelist, aviatrix, director and translator. Ruth Moesel was an American teacher who began collecting items on Chatterton as a hobby and later compiled information on Chatterton for a biography which was written, but never published. The Ruth Moesel collection of Ruth Chatterton materials contains scrapbooks, which document Chatterton's career with photographs, clippings, programs, as well as loose scripts, correspondence, photographs and other publicity materials.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photography and photocopying will apply. Advance notice maybe required. Artifacts may be available, subject to the decision of library staff.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Ruth Moesel collection of Ruth Chatterton materials, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: This collection consisted mainly of two runs of scrapbooks, which were dismantled and boxed, according to their original organization, which was chronological. The scrapbooks contain photographs, articles, interviews and other publicity materials. Loose items were arranged in appropriate groupings.

Creator history

Ruth Chatterton was an American actress, novelist, aviatrix, director and translator. Chatterton was born in New York City on December 24, 1893 to a family of good social standing. Her father's family was descended from the poet Thomas Chatterton. Her parents' divorce left Ruth and her mother badly off. There are many different stories of how her stage debut came about, but the fact remains that at age 14 she joined a touring company in Washington D.C.

Chatterton made her Broadway debut in 1911 in *The Great Name*, produced by Henry W. Savage. Her second play, *The Rainbow* (1912), was produced by Henry Miller, who became a mentor for the young actress. Though Chatterton had received good reviews and attention from the press for her first two plays, her next, *Daddy Long Legs* (1914), made her a star. Her reign as a Broadway star lasted through the next decade and in the late 1920s she moved to Los Angeles to work there in theater.

The renowned actor Emil Jannings saw Chatterton on stage and helped her to get her first (and only silent) film role, playing opposite him, in *Sins of the Fathers* (1928). Chatterton was promptly signed by Paramount Studios, which produced that film. For the first few years of the talkie-era, Chatterton was Paramount's lead female star, specializing in weepy melodramas, playing fallen women (depicted with a level of frankness impossible after the Production Code was enforced in 1934) and self-sacrificing mothers in such films as *Madame X* (1929), *Sarah and Son* (1930), *The Lady of Scandal* (1930) and *Unfaithful* (1931).

In the Early 1930s, one of Paramount's rival studios, Warner Brothers, went after Chatterton, in an effort to give some class to the studio, known for gritty gangster films. Chatterton made some of her most interesting films while at Warner Brothers, most notably, *Female* (1933). This film is shocking, even for the pre-code era. Chatterton plays an executive who dominates her male employees in the bedroom as well as in the boardroom. The film takes a disappointing, but predictable turn when she meets her match in George Brent and effectively loses her power. Other notable films from Chatterton's time at Warner Brothers include *Frisco Jenny* (1932), *Lily Turner* (1933) and *Journal of a Crime* (1934).

As she passed age 40, Chatterton felt her film career winding down, but she did make a brief comeback in the film she is most remembered for today. *Dodsworth* (1936) was an adaptation of Sinclair Lewis' novel about a middle-aged American husband and wife, who retire to Europe together and quickly realize they have nothing in common. Despite the acclaim she received for *Dodsworth*, her career in American movies was over. She made a few films in England and then retired from the screen.

Chatterton did return to stage acting in the 1940s and 1950s, but she also took up a new career, writing. She published four novels: *Lovers and Friends* (1949), *Homeward Bourne* (1950), *The Betrayers* (1953) and *The Pride of the Peacock* (1954). Another hobby of Chatterton's, even at the height of her screen popularity, was flying. She was a trained pilot, who participated in competitions and flew solo across the Atlantic a few times.

Ruth Chatterton was married to actor Ralph Forbes from 1924 to 1932. She divorced Forbes to marry her frequent Warner Brothers co-star, George Brent in 1932, but the marriage only lasted until 1934. In 1942 she married Barry Thomson. Her third marriage lasted until Thomson's death in 1960. Chatterton died in her Connecticut home on November 24, 1961.

Ruth Moesel was an American teacher living in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She began collecting items on Chatterton as a hobby and later compiled information on Chatterton for a biography which was written, but never published.

Scope and content note

The Ruth Moesel collection of Ruth Chatterton materials contains scrapbooks, which cover Chatterton's career with photographs, clippings, programs, as well as loose scripts, correspondence, photographs and other publicity materials.

This collection consists mainly of scrapbooks on Ruth Chatterton's life and career, created by Ruth Moesel. The scrapbooks are arranged in two separate runs. The General Career scrapbooks, arranged chronologically, cover Chatterton's entire career as stage actress, film actress and novelist, with clippings, photographs, programs and other publicity materials. The second run of scrapbooks, also arranged chronologically, is called Mounted Film Stills. The highlight of the collection, these scrapbooks consist of hundreds of production shots from all of Chatterton's films.

There are also some loose files on Chatterton's personal life and productions she appeared in, consisting of awards, clippings, correspondence, drawings and paintings, photographs, correspondence, scripts and programs.

Moesel's files include drafts for the biography of Chatterton she was working on and correspondence about the biography. There is also correspondence between Moesel and people she interviewed for her book and with repositories she considered donating her collection of Chatterton materials to.

Artifacts in this collection include a mink collar, a dress and jacket, 3 purses, jewelry worn by Chatterton on stage, jars of cosmetic powder and a doll of Chatterton in Daddy Long Legs. Please speak to reference staff to request artifacts.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged alphabetically by format.

Key terms

Subjects

Aviation
Fiction -- 20th century
Motion Pictures -- United States -- 20th century
Theater -- United States -- 20th century

Occupations

Actresses -- Motion Pictures -- 20th Century
Actresses -- Theater -- 20th Century
Novelists -- American -- 20th Century
Translators

Names

Chatterton, Ruth, 1893-1961
Moesel, Ruth
Thomson, Barry

Special formats

Clippings
Correspondence
Photographs
Programs
Scrapbooks
Scripts

Container list

Scrapbooks, 1909-1961

General Collection

Early Stage Career

- b.1 f.1-4 1, 1909-1913
- b.2 f.1-4 2, 1914-1916
- b.3 f.1-4 3, 1917-1920
- b.4 f.1-4 4, 1921-1927

Screen Career

- b.5 f.1-4 5, 1928-1929
- b.29 f.1-4 6, 1929 December-1930 August
- b.6 f.1-4 7, 1930 December-1932 February
- b.7 f.1-4 8, 1932 May-October
- b.8 f.1-4 9, 1933 January-1934 February
- b.9 f.1-4 10, 1936 January-September
- b.10 f.1-4 11, 1936 August-1938

Resumption of Stage Career, 1939-1960

- b.11 f.1-4 12, 1938-1940 July
- b.12 f.1-4 13, 1940-1941 March
- b.13 f.1-4 14, 1941-1942
- b.14 f.1-4 15, 1942 July-1946 February
- b.15 f.1-4 16, 1946 February-1950 February
- b.16 f.1-4 17, 1950 March-1952 August
- b.17 f.1-4 18, 1953-1955 October
- b.18 f.1-4 19, 1955 October-1958 June
- b.19 f.1-4 20, 1958 July-1961 November 24

Mounted Film Stills

- b.20 f.1-4 1, 1928 January-1929 December
Sins of the Fathers, The Doctor's Secret, The Dummy, Madame X
- b.21 f.1-4 2, 1929 August-December
Charming Sinners, The Laughing Lady
- b.22 f.1-4 3, 1930 March-May
Sarah and Son, Paramount on Parade, The Lady of Scandal
- b.23 f.1-4 4, 1930 August-December (*Anybody's Woman, A Right to Love*)
- b.24 f.1-4 5, 1930 December-1931 March (*Unfaithful*)
- b.25 f.1-4 6, 1931 July-1932 February
The Magnificent Lie, Once a Lady, Tomorrow and Tomorrow
- b.26 f.1-4 7, 1932 May-October
The Rich are Always with Us, The Crash
- b.27 f.1-4 8, 1933 January-1943 February (*Frisco Jenny, Lilly Turner*)
- b.29 f.1-4 9, 1933 November-1934 February (*Female, Journal of a Crime*)
- b.30 f.1-4 10, 1936 January (*Lady of Secrets*)

Scrapbooks, 1909-1961 (cont.)

Mounted Film Stills (cont.)

- b.31 f.1-4 11, 1936 August (*Girls Dormitory, Dodsworth*)
- b.32 f.1-4 12, 1936 September-1938 (*Dodsworth, The Rat*)
- b.35 f.6-7 Unmounted Scrapbook Materials, 1932-1961

Productions, 1924-1954

- b.33 f.1 *The Affairs of Anatol*, 1939
 - b.33 f.2 *Anybody's Woman*, undated
 - b.33 f.3 *Caprice*, 1946
 - b.33 f.4 *Hamlet*, undated
 - b.33 f.5 *Happy Ending*, 1960
 - b.33 f.6 *House in Ohio Street*, undated
 - b.33 f.7 *Idiot's Delight*, 1951
 - b.33 f.8 *Leave Her to Heaven*, 1940
 - b.33 f.9 *The Little Foxes*, 1948
 - b.33 f.10 *Lovers and Friends*, 1949
 - b.33 f.11 *The Madwoman of Chailot*, 1947
 - b.33 f.12 *The Magnolia Lady*, 1924
 - b.33 f.13 *Mimosa Hill*, 1952
 - b.33 f.14 *O' Mistress Mine*, 1951
 - b.33 f.15 *Old Acquaintance*, undated
 - b.37 f.1 *A Present from the Past*, 1953
Unproduced television script by Chatterton and Barry Thomson
 - b.33 f.16 *Private Lives*, 1943
 - b.33 f.17 *Pygmalion*, 1940
 - b.33 f.18 *The Reluctant Debutante*, 1957
 - b.33 f.19 *Saint Joan*, 1937
 - b.34 f.1 *Second Best Bed*, 1946
 - b.34 f.2 *Sign of Winter*, undated
 - b.34 f.3 *Sorrow for Angels*, undated
 - b.34 f.4 *Susan and God*, 1954
 - b.34 f.5 *Susan and the Stranger*, undated
 - b.34 f.6 *Treat Her Gently*, 1941
 - b.34 f.7 Novels, 1950, 1955
- Personal, 1931-1963
- b.37 f.2 Awards, 1951, 1963
 - b.38 f.1-3 Awards, 1951-1955
 - b.39 f.1 Awards, 1954
 - b.34 f.8-11 Career in General-Publicity and Photographs, 1930s-1950s

Personal, 1931-1963 (cont.)

- b.35 f.1 Drawings of Chatterton, undated
- b.38 f.4-5 Drawings of Chatterton, undated
- b.40 f.1 Drawings of Chatterton, undated
- b.35 f.2 Obituaries of Chatterton and Barry Thomson, 1960, 1961
- b.37 f.3 Paintings of Chatterton, undated
- b.35 f.3 Press Coverage of Chatterton's Aviation, 1936
- b.35 f.4 Photographs-Portraits and Candid, 1931-1938
- b.37 f.4-5 Photographs, 1938-1940
- b.35 f.5 Photographs and Correspondence: Barry Thomson, 1939, undated
Thomson was Chatterton's third husband, from 1942 until his death in 1960.

Ruth Moesel Files, 1918-1974

- b.35 f.8 Auction on Chatterton Estate, 1962
- b.35 f.9 Biography Drafts, 1966
- b.36 f.1-2 Biography Drafts, 1966
- b.36 f.3-6 Correspondence, 1936-1974
- b.36 f.7 Photographs, undated
- b.36 f.8 Research-Notes and Clippings, 1918-1969