

Guide to the Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries, 1909 - 1914

***T-Mss 2002-010**

Billy Rose Theatre Division

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
New York, New York**

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Date Completed: June 2006

Processed and encoded through a gift from Robert W. Wilson.

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Descriptive Summary

Title:	Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries
Collection ID:	*T-Mss 2002-010
Creator:	Brown, Chamberlain and Lyman
Extent:	3 linear feet (5 boxes)
Repository:	Billy Rose Theatre Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Abstract: The Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries consist of nine volumes of *Plays and Playgoers: A Theatre-Goer's Record*, completed by the brothers, who worked primarily as theatrical casting agents. The diaries cover productions they attended as young teens, primarily in Boston from the years 1909 to 1914.

Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries, *T-Mss 2002-010, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Custodial History

The Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries were purchased by the Billy Rose Theatre Division in 2002.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in 2006.

Related Material

Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Biographical Note

Theatrical casting agents, producers, and writers, brothers Chamberlain and Lyman Brown were born in Hartford, Connecticut in the 1890s of a prominent New England family. Chamberlain, the elder of the two brothers, was educated at Harvard and while there he began a career as an actor in Cambridge, Lynn, and Boston theaters, including Castle Square. While still in his teens, he formed his own stock company and became an owner and manager of a theater in Lowell, Massachusetts. Chamberlain Brown moved to New York City, where by 1913, he had opened his own company, The Chamberlain Agency, to manage actors and cast theatrical productions. He discovered and represented many famous stars of theater, radio, and film. Chamberlain Brown died in 1955.

Lyman Brown joined his brother's theatrical agency as the Boston representative. Later he moved to New York City and worked in the New York office as a licensed Equity agent. Lyman Brown was a co-owner of the firm the Chamberlain Brown Agency, a manager of actors and a producer of plays for the Chamberlain Brown Players. He worked primarily casting summer stock productions throughout the United States and Canada. Lyman Brown died in 1961.

Scope and Content Note

The Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries consist of nine volumes of *Plays and Players: A Theatre-Goer's Record* (Chicago: Brewer Barse & Co.) documenting the brothers' theatergoing (mostly in Boston) as young teens, for the years from 1909 to 1914. Four of the diaries were kept by Chamberlain, the other five by Lyman. The diaries were gifts to the Brown brothers from their "Aunt Kit" (Emma) Lyman, who lived in New York with her husband Jack. The brothers visited the Lymans at Christmas and attended productions in New York, and these are documented in the diaries.

These diaries contain a number of sections to be completed by the playgoer. At the front of each volume, there is an "Index to Plays and Players" that gives the titles and page numbers for each production listed by the theatergoer. For each play seen, there are spaces for "Play, Date, Theatre, In Company With," "Comment of the Play," "Criticism of the Actors," and "Synopsis of the Play (Cut from Program)" to be completed, a space for a ticket stub, "Cast of Characters – Cut from Program," and "Portraits, Scenes and Clippings (To Be Cut from Magazines, Newspapers, etc.)." There are approximately forty-five productions in each diary, but Chamberlain's diary for the 1909 – 1910 season contains about seventy-two.

Most of the volumes have cast lists and clippings for each play, but some contain entire programs and publicity brochures. Ticket stubs are sometimes included, especially in the earlier volumes. There are also a few photographs in one or two of the diaries, as well as some loose

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clippings related to a production. A number of autographs can also be found on the clippings of actors' photographs.

Avidly pursuing the theater as a hobby since their childhood, the two brothers faithfully completed, by hand, the specifics (title, date, venue) for each show and also wrote their comments about the play, criticism of the actors, and a synopsis of the production. Additionally, at the end of several volumes, Chamberlain Brown wrote lists such as "Stars of the Future," "My Three Favorite Shows," "My Three Favorite Actors of the Season," (also actresses), and "The Most Promising Actor and Actress."

Their comments are sometimes humorous; for example, Chamberlain's comments on *Jumping Jupiter* (Boston Theatre, April 12, 1911), a play whose cast featured Helen Broderick, Ina Claire, and Jeanne Eagels: "Jupiter may have jumped but he didn't land on his feet." Lyman opined on the *Ziegfeld Follies* (Colonial Theatre, February 19, 1913): "...entertainment characterized by an entire absence of plot and an abundance of legs..."

The Brown Brothers were especially fond of operettas, and this is reflected in many of the productions they attended, such as *M'lle. Rosita* with Fritzi Scheff (Boston Theatre, March 27, 1911), Emma Trentini in *Naughty Marietta* (Boston Theatre, April 1, 1911), and Christie MacDonald in *Sweethearts* (Colonial Theatre, May 5, 1913) to name but a few. Several *Ziegfeld Follies* productions are documented, as well as a number of George M. Cohan shows.

Organization

The Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Theater Diaries are organized in the following series

- Series I: Chamberlain Brown Diaries, 1909 - 1912
- Series II: Lyman Brown Diaries, 1911 - 1914

Series Descriptions

Series I: Chamberlain Brown Diaries, 1909 – 1912

2 boxes; 1 linear foot

Arrangement: Chronological

This series consists of four volumes of *Plays and Playgoers: A Theatre-Goer's Record* belonging to Chamberlain Brown and completed by him, as a teenager. The diaries document productions he attended, often with his brother, mostly in Boston, but also in New York City

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around Christmastime, as well as a few in Philadelphia. The first volume covers the 1909 – 1910 season, the second 1910 – 1911, the third 1911, and the fourth 1911 – 1912.

Production details and comments are handwritten in the appropriate section; portions of programs are affixed to the page, as well as related clippings from magazines. In some instances, the entire program is included, as well as publicity booklets and ticket stubs. There are also several autographed clippings, mostly pictures of performers, and a few photos, some of which were taken by Chamberlain Brown. Additionally, at the back of the first two diaries, Chamberlain lists his favorite plays and stars of the season, and the “Stars of the Future from the Season 1909 – 1910.” In the 1911 – 1912 diary, he lists “Impossible Actors.”

The productions seen include a number of operettas, as well as some vaudeville and versions of the *Follies*. Just a few of the stars represented in the diaries are Maude Adams, Margaret Anglin, John Barrymore, Sarah Bernhardt, Fanny Brice, George M. Cohan, Jane Cowl, Douglas Fairbanks, Lew Fields, William Gillette, Walter Hampden, Anna Held, Alla Nazimova, Anna Pavlova, Florence Reed, Blanche Ring, Fritzi Scheff, Otis Skinner, and E.H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe, Bert Williams, and Peggy Wood. Of particular note is a *Friars' Club Frolic* Chamberlain attended at the Boston Theatre in June 1911; Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, and Julian Eltinge were among the performers.

Series II: Lyman Brown Diaries, 1911 - 1914

3 boxes; 2 linear feet

Arrangement: Chronological

This series contains five volumes of *Plays and Playgoers: A Theatre-Goer's Record* owned by Lyman Brown and completed by him. The first volume covers January 18 through November of 1911, the second, November 10, 1911 through May 1, 1912, the third May 6 through December 28 of 1912, the fourth Dec. 28, 1912 through Oct. 20, 1913, and the fifth October 27, 1913 through May 21, 1914. Since the brothers saw many of the productions together, many of the programs are the same when the diaries overlap chronologically. However, there are numerous additional productions attended by Lyman with others, including one in which Chamberlain appeared in a bit part, *The Yellow Jacket* at the Fulton Theatre in New York in 1912. Lyman's comments, not surprisingly, are complimentary: “One of the best pieces I have ever seen and one that deserves a long and prosperous run everywhere it goes.”

The brothers also seem to have shared the clippings, since their diaries contain different ones for the same production they attended together. Lyman appears somewhat less diligent than Chamberlain in keeping his play diaries, since in three of his diaries he lists “Plays I Have Seen But Not Criticised [sic].” Of particular note is the opening night of the Cort Theatre in Boston, January 19, 1914, although Lyman's opinion is that it “wasn't a very gala occasion.”

Series I: Chamberlain Brown Diaries, 1909 - 1912

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	1909 - 1910 (Includes photos of Tremont Theatre, Boston, exterior and Rivers and Pons Piano Co. storefront, and photo of George Lydecker and Arthur Conrad of the \$3,000,000 company, taken by Chamberlain at stage door; mostly Boston productions, but also New York City, and Philadelphia; "Stars of the Future from the Season 1909 - 1910," "Three Show I Liked Best," "My Three Favorite Actors of the Season," "My Three Favorite Actresses of the Season," and "The Most Promising Actor and Actress.)
	2	1910 - 1911 (Includes two photos of Morgan Coman taken by Chamberlain Brown at Heublein Hotel, Hartford; mostly Boston productions, but also a number in New York, and lists "Stars of the Future Season 1910 - 1911," "The Three Shows I Liked Best, and "The Most Promising Actor and Actress.")
2	1	1911 Mar. 6 - 1911 Nov. 16 (Although this diary is labeled "Season 1911 - 12," it covers only 1911; includes (following p. 1), two oxidized photos of unidentified actress; also includes material for a <i>Friars' Club Frolic</i> at the Boston Theatre, June 7, 1911, in which Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, and Julian Eltinge performed.)
	2	1911 Nov. 27 - 1912 June 10 (Includes clippings for <i>Kidnapped for Revenge</i> (Columbia Theatre, Aug. 10, 1907); also lists "Stars of the Future," and "Impossible Actors" at the end of the volume.)

Series II: Lyman Brown Diaries, 1911-1914

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
3	1	1911 Jan 18 - 1911 Nov. 4 ("Lyman Chamberlain Brown" written on flyleaf; includes loose note to "Dear Buster Brown" from M.A. Luescher (sp.?), re: "Mr. Mansfield's signature (in with <i>The Prince of Pilsen</i> , Majestic, Theatre, Boston, Apr. 17, 1911); also includes autographs of Carrie Reynolds, Flavia Arcaro, and Craig Campbell (<i>The Red Rose</i> , Tremont Theatre, Boston) May 29, 1911.)
	2	1911 Nov. 10 - 1912 May 1 (Includes two loose business cards: "Chamberlain Brown" and "Mr. Henry Mortimer - The Lambs;" also includes three handwritten columns headed "Show," "Woman," and "Man" on inside of back cover.)
4	1	1912 May 6 - 1912 Dec. 28 ("Lyman Chamberlain Brown" written on flyleaf; includes program, clippings, and comments for <i>Yellow Jacket</i> , Fulton Theatre, N.Y., Dec. 21, 1912 in which Chamberlain Brown had a bit part; also includes list of "Shows I Have Seen But Not Critisized." [sic])
	2	1912 Dec. 28 - 1913 Oct. 20 (Includes comments on the <i>Ziegfeld Follies</i> , Colonial Theatre, Boston, Feb. 19, 1913.)
5	1	1913 Oct. 27 - 1914 May 21 (Includes list of "Plays I Saw But Did Not Critisize" [sic]; also includes program, clippings, and comments on opening of Cort Theatre, Boston Jan. 19, 1914.)