

**Inventory of the Helene Champlain Papers, 1932-1969**

\*T Mss 1986-013

Billy Rose Theatre Division



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

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## **Descriptive Summary**

Title: Helene Champlain Papers, 1932-1969

Collection ID: \*T-Mss 1986-013

Creator: Champlain, Helene

Extent: .4 linear feet; 1 box

Repository: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.  
Billy Rose Theatre Division.

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## **Administrative Information**

Access: Collection is open to the public. Photocopying prohibited.

Preferred Citation: Helene Champlain Papers, \*T-Mss 1986-013, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Processing Information: The collection was originally processed in 1991. It was reprocessed with new archival classmarks and a finding aid written in 1998

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## **Biographical Note**

There is very little information about the public or private life of Helene Champlain. As a book dealer and collector in the New York City area between the 1930s and 1960s her devotion to her customers' requests for books, articles and clippings, furnished the foundation for numerous epistolary friendships with these literary and theatrical celebrities. The letters from these celebrities (her own letters to them are not included in this collection) indirectly document that she was an avid theater-goer, a thoughtful letter-writer, and a loyal, sympathetic and "encouraging" friend and confidante. Although she was very reticent about discussing her private life, the letters establish that she roomed with and helped support an aspiring actress (Wendy Drew) around 1949-1950, that during the summers she liked to stay with friends involved in summer stock productions, and that she at times suffered from work anxieties, health crises, and painful bereavements.

Miss Champlain worked at a variety of jobs in the early 1930s (evidently including the writing of a column for *Harpers*), wrote a novel around 1935, worked at the Waldorf-Astoria Bookshop by the late 1940s (perhaps much earlier), and left her position as the

bookshop's manager at the end of 1962. The collection's one photograph which includes Miss Champlain (in the Charles Edison folder) dates from 1959.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Helene Champlain papers consist of personal and professional correspondence from celebrities during the years between 1932 and 1969. Much of this correspondence is cordial but impersonal, revealing primarily Miss Champlain's usefulness to her clients in obtaining books, articles and clippings, in arranging book-signings, in writing supportive letters to publishers, etc. However, some of the correspondence - e.g. from Maurice Chevalier, Arthur MacArthur, Margaret Sandburg [Carl Sandburg's daughter], and Emlyn Williams - displays a warmer, more personal relationship with Miss Champlain and provides glimpses into the public and private lives, as well as literary opinions, of the correspondents.

By far the largest, and perhaps most valuable, collection of letters comes from the actor and director Rollo Peters. Over the course of 32 years from 1932 to 1964, his correspondence reveals a deepening affection and respect for Helene Champlain (along with many references to her private life and career). More importantly, this correspondence reveals the lineaments of an important acting career from youthful renown to later obscurity: the plays he appeared in, the acting troupe he performed with overseas during World War II, the community theaters he administered, and finally the ordeal he suffered trying to get his memoirs published. The letters also contain many capsule critiques of contemporary dramas, novels, authors, playwrights and actors.

### **Organization**

The Helene Champlain papers are arranged alphabetically by correspondent, then chronologically within each correspondent's folder.

### **Container Listing**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| b. 1 f. 1 | Bevans, Philippa,<br>1961<br>1 item       |
| b. 1 f. 2 | Chevalier, Maurice, 1955-1968<br>30 items |
| b. 1 f. 3 | Coward, Noel, 1933-1961<br>7 items        |
| b. 1 f. 4 | Drew, Wendy, 1950-1960<br>3 items         |
| b. 1 f. 5 | Edison, Charles, 1959<br>2 items          |

- b. 1 f. 6 Goring, Marius, 1959-1961  
2 items
- b. 1 f. 7 Lee, Colin, 1963 and undated  
2 items
- b. 1 f. 8 MacArthur, Arthur, 1955-1962  
7 items
- b. 1 f. 9 MacArthur, Jean (Mrs. Douglas), 1956-1964  
4 items
- b. 1 f. 10 Mason, James, 1947  
1 item
- b. 1 f. 11 Olivier, Laurence, 1958-1963  
3 items
- b. 1 f. 12 Peters, Rollo, 1932-1964  
97 items
- b. 1 f. 13 Porter, Cole, 1949  
2 items
- b. 1 f. 14 Sandburg, Margaret, 1969  
2 items
- b. 1 f. 15 Williams, Emlyn, 1962-1963  
5 items