



The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Walter Nicks papers

1899-2004 [bulk 1953-2000]

(S) *MGZMD 352

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

Summary

Creator: Nicks, Walter

Title: Walter Nicks papers

Date: 1899-2004 [bulk 1953-2000]

Size: 9.92 linear feet (25 boxes, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Gift of Walter Nicks, 2007.

Abstract: Walter Nicks (1924-2007) was an American dancer, choreographer, and educator. The Walter Nicks papers date from 1899 to 2004 and document Walter Nicks' career as a choreographer, educator, and director of the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop. The collection holds professional files, photographs, slides, programs, articles, and posters.

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audiovisual material in the collection may be directed to the the Dance Division at dance@nypl.org. Audiovisual material will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Conditions Governing Use: For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Dance Division at dance@nypl.org.

Preferred citation: Walter Nicks papers, (S) *MGZMD 352. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014 Original order and folder titles were maintained. Loose material was placed into folders.

Creator History

Walter Nicks (1924-2007) was an American dancer, choreographer, and educator. His career spanned over 60 years. Nicks trained under several modern dance instructors, including José Limón and Marie

Bryant, though he trained most intensively under Katherine Dunham, and would later become a certified master teacher of the Katherine Dunham Technique. Nicks traveled to Mexico in 1953 and started his first company, El Ballet Negro de Walter Nicks. The company performed in Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Nicks also studied Voodoo dance in Haiti and cultural dances in Brazil. During this time he also danced and choreographed in several pieces in the United States, including the Broadway shows *My Darling Aida*, *House of Flowers*, and *Jamaica*. From 1959 to 1963, Nicks was the choreographer for Harry Belafonte. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he was active within the Swedish dance community in Stockholm. He was director of Statens Dansskola in Stockholm, and consulted and instructed at the University of Stockholm and the Swedish Ballet. In 1972 he founded the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop. Nicks and his Workshop dancers focused on several community outreach programs, including the Arts Recognition and Talent Search (ARTS), and the Artists-in-Schools program, a program funded through the National Endowment for the Arts and state arts agencies. Through these programs, Nicks and his company held residencies at several elementary and secondary public schools across the United States through the 1980s. The bulk of Nicks' career was spent teaching courses and workshops at colleges, universities, and for other dance companies throughout Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the United States. Through the 1990s Nicks held faculty artist residencies at Connecticut College, The University of Maryland, The University of Nevada, and Duke University.

Walter Nicks died in 2007 in Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Content Note

The Walter Nicks papers date from 1899 to 2004 and document Walter Nicks' career as a choreographer, educator, and director of the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop. The collection holds professional files, photographs, slides, programs, articles, and posters. A small amount of personal material is also included in the collection.

Professional files consist of correspondence, contracts, dance course and workshop schedules, syllabi, newsletters, meeting agendas, scholarly articles, resumes and biographies of dancers, and Nicks' choreography and class exercise notes. The professional files document Nicks' involvement in a wide-range of dance-related endeavors. The National Endowment for the Arts Artists-in-Schools program, the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop, The International Association of Blacks in Dance, and his teaching and performing in Sweden are among the best-represented projects.

The activities of the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop are well represented through correspondence; funding invoices and budgets; agreements with contractors (soloists); workshop and class schedules; and programs. The company's search for dancers, funding, and solidifying the company's mission are among topics of correspondence. The Workshop's affiliation with the Connecticut College American Dance Festival is documented through festival schedules, meeting agendas, and other planning documents. Documents relating to the Artists-in-Schools program consist of applications from teachers requesting lessons for their classes, letters and drawings from kids, correspondence with state arts councils and the National Endowment for the Arts, and meeting and course schedules. Faculty meeting agendas, rules and regulations for faculty and students, annual reports, and class outlines document Nicks' involvement with the Swedish dance community in Stockholm. These documents are chiefly in Swedish. The material in the general professional files represent the high demand for Nicks' services by a wide range of communities. Correspondence relates to his availability to teach classes and workshops, to consult for existing dance programs and companies, and to perform and speak at conferences and fund-raisers. Resumes and biographical information on other dancers and instructors are here, as well as miscellaneous course schedules and

syllabi.

Photographs and slides in this collection date from the 1950s to the 1990s and document performances, teaching, and some of Nicks' personal travels. Early photographs document Nicks' first dance company, El Ballet Negro de Walter Nicks. Performances pictured include Sans Souci in Havana, Cuba, and the company's appearance on LA V02 Dominicana Television in the Dominican Republic. Nicks' fellowship to study cultural movement in Brazil in 1956 is documented thoroughly. Images of the The Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop show dancers in the studio, at performances, and in more casual settings. Members of the company in the photographs are Walter Nicks, Vendetta Mathea, Alvin McDuffie, Jack Walsh, Diedre Lovell, and Bruce Taylor. There are several photographs of Nicks teaching dance classes in Sweden.

Programs and Publications generally document dance companies, events, and projects not specifically pertaining to Nicks' career, though some announcements and programs for pieces he performed in or choreographed are present. Materials primarily date from 1946 to 2002, with four issues of the short-lived literary and artistic magazine, El Quatre Gats, dated 1899. Material consists of programs, newsletters, announcements, scholarly articles, newspaper clippings, and journals relating to dance and the arts. Articles range in topic from dance history and technique, to reviews of performances put on by both Nicks and other companies.

Posters in this collection announce performances, workshops, and other events that Nicks was involved in. The posters predominantly advertise the work he did in the 1970s and 1980s with the Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop.

The collection holds a small amount of personal material, primarily consisting of correspondence with friends, colleagues, and past students. Documents relating to Nicks' long time companion, Arthur O'Neil, are also present, including O'Neil's sheet music, his resumes, and correspondence between the two.

This collection holds some film reels and other audiovisual material. Inquiries regarding audiovisual material in the collection may be directed to the Dance Division at dance@nypl.org. Audiovisual material will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

The collection is predominantly in English with some material in Swedish and French.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into five groups: Professional Files; Photographs and Slides; Programs and Publications; Personal Files; and Posters.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American dancers
Dance -- Study and teaching
Modern dance

Occupations

Choreographers
Dancers

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence
Photographs

Container List

Professional Files

- b. 1 f. 1-2 Addresses and Business Cards 1977-1994
- b. 1 f. 3 Administration 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 4 After 1990 1990-1993
Unsorted miscellaneous material.
- b. 1 f. 5 American Dance Festival 1974-1977
- b. 1 f. 6-8 Appointment Books 1962-1983
- Artists-In-Schools
- b. 1 f. 9-11 1973-1977 1973-1977
- b. 2 f. 1-7 1973-1991 1973-1991
- b. 2 f. 8 Arts Recognition and Talent Search 1980-1983
- b. 3 f. 1 Atlanta 1985
- b. 3 f. 2 Barcelona 1985
- b. 3 f. 3-6 Black Dance 1991-2002
- b. 3 f. 7 Cards and Correspondence--Professional 2001-2002
- b. 3 f. 8 Caribbean 1977-1979
- b. 3 f. 9 Company Receipts and Check Stubs 1973-1976
- b. 3 f. 10 Correspondence With Dancers 1975-1997
- b. 4 f. 1-2 Dance 1984-2004
- b. 4 f. 3-4 Dance Career Documents 1982-2003
- b. 4 f. 5 Dancemobile 1985-1986
- Dunham, Katherine
- b. 4 f. 6-7 1946-2003 1946-2003
- b. 5 f. 1-5 1982-2003 1982-2003
- b. 5 f. 6-9 Dunham Institute 2000
- b. 6 f. 1-2 Finland 1979-1989
- b. 6 f. 3-4 Fédération Française de Danse 1972-1981
A significant portion of this material is in French.
- b. 6 f. 5-8 France 1968-1991
A significant portion of this material is in French.
- b. 7 f. 1 Gaffney Drama 1975-1976
- General Professional Files
- b. 7 f. 2-6 1969-2001 1969-2001
- b. 23 f. 12 1971, 1987 1971, 1987
- b. 7 f. 7 Germany 1968-1984
- b. 7 f. 8-9 Harlem 1969-1995
- b. 7 f. 10 Honorary Degree 1974-1975
- b. 8 f. 1 Incoming Correspondence 1968-1970
- b. 8 f. 2-6 International Association of Blacks in Dance 1995-2003
- b. 8 f. 7 Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival 2002

Professional Files (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 8 Miscellaneous 1971-1985
- b. 8 f. 9 Music 1995, 2001
- b. 9 f. 1 New York Arts Council 1975-1976
- b. 9 f. 2-3 Nicks' Career 1983-2003
- b. 9 f. 4 Nicks' Resumes 1970-1994
- b. 9 f. 5-8 Notes 1958-1999
- b. 9 f. 9 Physical Culture 1982-1996
- b. 9 f. 10 Pre-1960 1955
Unsorted miscellaneous material
- b. 9 f. 11 Rhode Island and Connecticut American Dance Festival 1976
- b. 9 f. 12 Special 1975
- b. 10 f. 1-7 Sweden 1962-1995
A significant portion of this material is in Swedish.
- b. 10 f. 8 University of Maryland 1970-1980
- b. 10 f. 9 University of Nevada, Las Vegas 1992-1993
- b. 10 f. 10 Unsorted 1967-1996
Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop
- b. 10 f. 11-12 1970-1982 1970-1982
- b. 11 f. 1-7 1972-1986 1972-1986

Photographs and Slides

Photographs

- b. 12 f. 1-7 1950s-1997 1950s-1997
- b. 24 f. 1-5 1950s-1990s 1950s-1990s
- b. 23 f. 3-6 1953 1953
- b. 13 f. 1-7 1960s-2001 1960s-2001
- b. 13 f. 8 Africa 1960s
- b. 13 f. 9 Early Performances 1945-1958
- b. 14 f. 1 El Ballet Negro de Walter Nicks 1950s
- b. 14 f. 2 Europe 1980s
- b. 14 f. 3 Nicks-Portraits 1980s
- b. 14 f. 4-6 Negatives 1960s-1970s
- b. 14 f. 4-6 1960s-1970s 1960s-1970s
- b. 25 1970s-1970s 1970s-1970s
- b. 23 f. 7 1984 1984
- b. 23 f. 7 Negatives 1984
- b. 14 f. 7-8 Rio de Janero 1956-1957
Sweden
- b. 15 f. 1-7 1962-1970s 1962-1970s
- b. 16 f. 1-2 1964-1965 1964-1965
- b. 16 f. 4-5 Walter Nicks Dance Theatre Workshop 1972-1979

Slides

- b. 16 f. 5-8 1957-1979 1957-1979

Photographs and Slides (cont.)
Slides (cont.)

b. 25 1950s-1990s 1950s-1990s

Programs and Publications

b. 22 f. 5 1899 1899
El Quatre Gats

b. 23 f. 8-11 1946-2000 1946-2000

o. 1 1953 1953
Dance Cage - flat file #261

b. 17 f. 1-7 1956-2002 1956-2002

b. 18 f. 1-9 1973-1993 1973-1993

b. 19 f. 1-6 1979-1992 1979-1992

b. 20 f. 1-8 1981-1998 1981-1998

Personal Files

b. 24 f. 6 1917-1951 1917-1951

b. 20 f. 9 1961-1995 1961-1995

b. 21 f. 1-7 1969-2003 1969-2003

b. 22 f. 1-4 1993-2004 1993-2004

Posters

b. 23 f. 1-3 1969-2000 1969-2000