



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Parker Fennelly papers**

1896-1997 [bulk 1911-1977]

\*T-Mss 1992-011

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** Fennelly, Parker

**Title:** Parker Fennelly papers

**Date:** 1896-1997 [bulk 1911-1977]

**Size:** 6.2 linear feet (13 boxes, 6 volumes)

**Source:** Donated by Mary Fennelly Michaelsen, 1992-2005

**Abstract:** Parker Fennelly (1891-1988) was an actor and playwright who performed on stage, radio, film, and television. The Parker Fennelly papers, dating from 1911 to 1997, document his career through project files, photographs, letters, programs, clippings, and scrapbooks.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2014

## Creator History

Parker Fennelly (1891-1988) was an actor and playwright who performed on stage, radio, film, and television. He grew up in Maine and studied acting at the Leland Powers School in Boston. Fennelly worked in theater for much of his career, appearing in 15 Broadway plays from 1924 to 1955, including *Mister Pitt* (with Walter Houston), *Our Town*, and *The Southwest Corner*. Two of Fennelly's plays were produced on Broadway: *Fulton of Oak Falls* (co-written with George M. Cohan) in 1937, and *Cuckoos on the Hearth* in 1941. The latter was often performed thereafter in summer theaters around the country. Several other plays of Fennelly's were also successfully produced.

Fennelly started working in radio during the late 1920s in a comedic duo with Arthur Allen called the Stebbins Boys, appearing on the programs *The Stebbins Boys of Bucksport Point* and *Snow Village Sketches* (also known as *Soconyland Sketches*). Fennelly and Allen portrayed stereotypical dry New

Englanders, a role Fennelly would play over and over. He later gained national fame on Fred Allen's radio program *Allen's Alley* in the mid-1940s, portraying Titus Moody, another version of the stock New England character.

Fennelly appeared on many live television programs of the 1950s, such as *Philco Television Playhouse*, *Studio One*, and *Lux Video Theatre*. Among his film credits were Alfred Hitchcock's *The Trouble With Harry* (1955), *The Kettles On Old MacDonald's Farm* (1957), *Pretty Poison* (1968), and *Angel In My Pocket* (1969). From the late 1950s to the 1980s, he was a commercial spokesman for *Pepperidge Farm* on radio and television, reprising the role of Titus Moody.

## Scope and Content Note

The Parker Fennelly papers, dating from 1911 to 1997, document the actor's career in theater, radio, television and film through project files, photographs, letters, programs, clippings, scrapbooks, and awards. Project files, photographs, and scrapbooks comprise the bulk of the collection.

The collection was partially compiled by Fennelly's daughter Mary Fennelly Michaelson, and some papers and scrapbooks contain her background notes. Content dating from after Parker Fennelly's death was contributed by Michaelson.

The project files are in two sections, acting and writing. Both are arranged alphabetically by title of the project, or subject. The acting portion holds annotated scripts, letters, programs, contracts, or photographs regarding plays, radio and television programs, and films in which Fennelly appeared. These include such plays as *The Southwest Corner*, *On Borrowed Time*, *Peaceful Valley*, and *The Sexton's Story*.

Radio series documented in the acting files include *The Stebbins Boys of Buckport Port*, *Soconyland Sketches*, *Allen's Alley*, and *Lawyer Tucker*, as well as several Kate Smith programs dating from 1933 to 1935. Television projects include *Wagon Train*, *Father Knows Best*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, and *Headmaster*. Films include *The Kettles on Old MacDonald's Farm*; *The Russians Are Coming*, *The Russians Are Coming*; *Pretty Poison*; *An Angel in My Pocket*; and *How to Frame a Figg*. Two files, titled *Motion Pictures* and *Radio Programs*, have lists of productions in which Fennelly appeared. They also hold photographs.

In addition, the acting files contain published scripts annotated by Fennelly, and files regarding *The Beechwood Players*, a theater company he directed from 1929 to 1931 in Briarcliff Manor, New York; Fennelly's commercial work, mainly for the *Pepperidge Farm* bakery company and the American Red Cross; the Leland Powers School; and the time Fennelly spent performing with a Chautauqua in the 1920s.

The writing files contain scripts or story outlines by Fennelly, mostly for stage plays. Some also hold letters, clippings, or photographs. Produced plays documented in the files include *Cuckoos On The Hearth*, *Fulton of Oak Falls*, *Murder Island*, *Old Man Greenlaw*, and *Yesterday's Lilacs*.

The photographs hold promotional portraits or stills for radio, television, or film productions, particularly for *The Stebbins Boys* programs with Arthur Allen. They also include images of other performers, such as the radio singer Lanny Ross.

The scrapbooks hold photographs, clippings, programs, and letters dating from 1912 to 1997. They are in five bound books (assembled by Mary Fennelly Michaelson), and in folders of unbound scrapbook

pages. A separate folder in the acting project files holds additional programs for plays in which Fennelly appeared.

The letter files contains correspondence from theatrical agents, literary agents, and commercial employers; a recommendation letter from Leland Powers; fan letters; and letters from Zona Gale. The separately-filed clipping is a 1932 full-page newspaper article about Fennelly and his family.

The papers also contain Fennelly's personal collection of programs and clippings regarding theater and music productions in New York and Chicago. Dating from 1896 to 1932, they do not document productions in which Fennelly appeared.

**Arrangement:** The papers are arranged by format.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Actors (performing artists)  
Playwrights

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings (information artifacts)  
Letters (correspondence)  
Photographs  
Programs (documents)  
Scrapbooks  
Scripts

### **Subjects**

Motion pictures -- United States  
Radio programs -- United States  
Television programs -- United States  
Theater -- United States -- 20th century

### **Names**

Allen, Arthur, 1959-  
Allen, Fred, 1894-1956

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Awards 1948-1962
- b. 3 f. 1 Clipping 1932
- b. 2 f. 3-6 Letters 1915-1997
  - Personal Theater Collection
  - Chicago
  - b. 2 f. 7 1896-1902
  - b. 3 f. 2 *Countess Marita* 1927
  - New York City
  - b. 3 f. 3 1897-1922
  - v. 6 1918-1932
  - Photographs
  - b. 1 f. 2 circa 1911
  - b. 2 f. 8 1933-1966, undated
  - With Arthur Allen
  - b. 1 f. 3 1931
  - b. 2 f. 9 1931-1932
  - b. 2 f. 10 Other Performers, undated
  - Project Files
  - Acting
  - b. 4 f. 1-12 A - He 1929-1977
  - b. 1 f. 4-6 B - M 1927-1928, 1936, 1962
  - b. 2 f. 1 Chatauquas 1920s-1937
  - b. 5 f. 1-10 Ho - Mr 1946-1970
  - b. 3 f. 4 L 1947
  - b. 2 f. 2 Leland Powers School 1929-1934
  - b. 6 f. 1-6 O - Pr 1911-1977
  - b. 2 f. 11 Programs 1927-1939
  - b. 7 Published Annotated Scripts 1911, 1936
  - b. 6 f. 7-10 R - Se 1922-1992
  - b. 8 f. 1-7 Si - Sm 1933-1935
  - b. 9 f. 1-10 So - W and Unidentified 1926-1961
  - Writing
  - b. 9 f. 11-12 A 1934-1936
  - b. 10 f. 1-10 C - M 1931-1992
  - b. 11 f. 1-8 N - Sp 1937-1974
  - b. 12 f. 1-6 Sw - Y 1935-1973
  - Scrapbooks
  - v. 1 1912-1928, 1977-1988
  - b. 12 f. 7-10 1915-1988

Scrapbooks (cont.)

v. 2	1928-1941
v. 3	1933-1944
b. 13 f. 1-4	1936-1978
v. 4	1946-1965
v. 5	1970-1997