



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Florida Friebus papers**

1926-1988

\*T-Mss 2003-013

Processed by Chris Borris.

## Summary

**Creator:** Friebus, Florida, 1909-1988

**Title:** Florida Friebus papers

**Date:** 1926-1988

**Size:** 1.66 linear feet (4 boxes)

**Source:** This collection was probably donated by Florida Friebus or her estate sometime before 1991.

**Abstract:** The papers of Florida Friebus, a theater and television actress, consists of personal and professional materials, including personal correspondence and biographical information, and photographs, scripts, contracts, and clippings related to Friebus' various performances.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

**Conditions Governing Use:** For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

**Preferred citation:** Florida Friebus Papers, \*T-Mss 2003-013. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Chris Borris; Machine-readable finding aid created by Chris Borris.

## Creator History

Though she is probably best known to modern audiences as "Dobie Gillis' mother" from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, a popular TV show of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Florida Friebus (1909-1988) made her mark and found her first and most enduring love in the theater.

Friebus hailed from an East Coast theatrical family that included her father, Theodore Friebus, a leading stage actor with Boston's Castle Square Players in the early 1900s and a minor silent-film actor, and her maternal grandmother, Georgine Flagg, who scandalized her own family in the late 19th century by venturing onstage as a player with Augustin Daly's stock company in Manhattan. Florida Friebus began her professional career on Broadway in *Triple Crossed* at the age of 18, in 1927, after studying at New York's Theatre Guild School. After several more roles on Broadway and in summer stock at Stockbridge, Massachusetts' Berkshire Playhouse, Friebus fell in with Eva Le Gallienne's well-regarded Civic Repertory Company. This would prove to be her big break and the beginning of a sweet obsession.

Looking to impress the famed Ms. Le Gallienne, the teenaged Friebus presented her with an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* after hearing that Le Gallienne had long been interested in doing something of that sort. Le Gallienne responded enthusiastically, and in 1932 she and Friebus debuted the first Broadway production of *Alice in Wonderland* to critical praise. A number of years went by as Friebus honed her craft, working on Broadway, in summer stock, and on touring productions, including *Pride and Prejudice* (Music Box Theatre), *The Primrose Path* (Biltmore), and *State of the Union* (Hudson Theater). Alice called, though, and in 1947, Friebus and Le Gallienne teamed again in a critically lauded revival of *Alice in Wonderland* on Broadway at the American Repertory Theatre. The newer mediums of radio and television called as well, and Friebus appeared on a number of radio shows (*Texaco Star Theatre*, etc.) and adapted her *Alice* script for TV in 1955. She worked extensively with the illustrious New Stages theater group beginning in the late 1940s as well.

Throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, Friebus worked in theater and TV, appearing notably on stage in *Absence of the Cello*, *Mornings at Seven*, and *Tea and Sympathy*, and on TV in *Dobie Gillis*, *Peyton Place*, *The Bob Newhart Show* and the children's storytelling show *Look and Listen*. But *Alice in Wonderland* came calling again in 1982 and 1983 with, respectively, a stage adaptation starring Le Gallienne and Kate Burton and a TV adaptation with Kate Burton and her father, Richard Burton.

Friebus was socially and politically active throughout her life as well, holding several positions with Actors' Equity Association throughout the years, including chair of the committee opposing Senator Joseph McCarthy's blacklist of actors in the 1950s and as a councilor in advocating for actors' rights. She was involved with the Dramatists Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. She was married for nearly 20 years, from 1934 to 1952, to fellow actor Richard Waring, who, not surprisingly, appeared in a production of *Alice in Wonderland* (Broadway, 1947). Friebus died in 1988 in Laguna Niguel, California, where she had resided for a number of years.

## Scope and Content Note

The Florida Friebus Papers consist of photocopied newspaper clippings, correspondence, contracts, scripts, photographs, playbills, and various personal papers. Much of the collection consists of reviews of productions in which Friebus appeared or was involved, personal essays and other autobiographical information, and contracts and correspondence relating to various productions. The majority of the photographs in the collection derive from productions in which Friebus appeared or was involved. Interestingly, Friebus' personal correspondence was almost invariably with people she knew in a professional capacity as well, indicating a great overlap in her personal and professional lives.

**Arrangement:** Series I: Personal Papers Sub-series 1 - Correspondence Sub-series 2 - Autobiographical information Sub-series 3 - Writings Sub-series 4 - Professional and Social Activities Sub-series 5 - Photographs Sub-series 6 - Scrapbooks Series II: Productions Sub-series 1 - Theater

Sub-series 2 - Television and Radio

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Actresses -- New York (State) -- New York

Television actors and actresses

Theater -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Names**

Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898

Friebus, Florida, 1909-1988

## Container List

### Series I: Personal Papers 1926-1988 (1 box)

This series contains letters and other correspondence to and from friends and colleagues; autobiographical sketches and resumes; essays and other writings; and clips, pamphlets, and other ephemera dealing with Friebus' social and professional life.

Sub-series 1 - Correspondence

Sub-series 2 - Autobiographical information

Sub-series 3 - Writings

Sub-series 4 - Professional and Social Activities

Sub-series 5 - Photographs

Sub-series 6 - Scrapbooks

#### Sub-series 1 - Correspondence 1955-1983 (2 folders)

- b. 1 f. 1 Assorted 1955-1983
- b. 1 f. Folder 2 Script sent by Herbert V. Gellendre 1968

#### Sub-series 2 - Autobiographical Information 1909-1988 (3 folders)

This sub-series contains autobiographical sketches of Friebus' life, as well as biographical information on her family.

- b. 1 f. 3 Resume and autobiographical profiles 1909-1988
- b. 1 f. 4 Head shots 1954-1974
- b. 1 f. 5 Family history 1961-1977

#### Sub-series 3 - Writings 1947-ca. 1969 (2 folders)

This sub-series contains essays and other articles Friebus wrote and submitted to newspapers, letters to the editor, and unpublished scripts and other writings.

- b. 1 f. 6 Published essays, letters, etc 1947-1954
- b. 1 f. 7 Unpublished script ca. 1960-1969

#### Sub-series 4 - Professional and Social Activities 1945-1979 (2 folders)

This sub-series contains pamphlets from professional associations, notably Actors' Equity, letters and receipts showing Friebus' refusal to pay the war tax, and other papers indicating Friebus' affiliation with various social and professional organizations.

- b. 1 f. 8 Actors' Equity Association and other union activity 1945-1979
- b. 1 f. 9 War tax suit 1972-1973

#### Sub-series 5 - Photographs 1930-1962 (1 folder)

This sub-series contains personal photographs, including those of friends and colleagues, with professional overlap.

- b. 1 f. 10 Photographs 1930-1962

#### Sub-series 6 - Scrapbooks 1958-1965 (1 volume)

This sub-series is made of assorted clippings, playbills, and other ephemera collected in a scrapbook by Florida Friebus.

- b. 1 f. 11 Scrapbook 1958-1965

Series II: Productions 1926-1988 (3 boxes)

The series contains clips, contracts, photographs, playbills, telegrams, and other materials detailing and highlighting Friebus' long involvement in theater, television and radio.

Sub-series 1 - Theater

Sub-series 2 - Television and Radio

Sub-series 1 - Theater 1926-1988 (38 folders)

This sub-series focuses on Friebus' involvement with theater, including Broadway productions, summer stock, and touring productions. A good deal of the material is on Friebus' productions of *Alice in Wonderland*, which were mounted on stage three times and adapted twice for television. Materials include clips, contracts, photographs, playbills, and telegrams.

*Alice in Wonderland* 1932

- b. 2 f. 1      Reviews 1932
- b. 2 f. 2      Photographs 1932
- b. 2 f. 3      Contracts 1932
- b. 2 f. 4      Reviews and playbills 1947
- b. 2 f. 6      Revised script, Part I of II 1947
- b. 2 f. 7      Revised script, Part II of II 1947
- b. 2 f. 8      Sheet music (partial) 1947
- b. 2 f. 9      Score (complete) 1947
- b. 2 f. 10      Contracts 1947
- b. 2 f. 11      Royalty disputes and tax Records 1947
- b. 3 f. 1      Reviews (television adaptation) 1955
- b. 3 f. 2      Reviews 1982-1983
- b. 3 f. 3      Reviews (television adaptation) 1983
- b. 3 f. 4      Contracts (television adaptation) 1983
- b. 3 f. 5      *Alice in Wonderland* material, not related to Florida Friebus 1951-1982
- b. 3 f. 6      *State of the Union* - Reviews 1946-1947
- New Stages Theater Company 1948-1949
- b. 3 f. 7      Reviews 1948-1949
- b. 3 f. 8      Photographs 1948-1949
- Legend of Sarah* 1951
- b. 3 f. 9      Reviews and playbills 1951
- b. 3 f. 10      Photographs 1951
- b. 3 f. 11      *Collector's Item* - Reviews and playbills 1952
- Tea and Sympathy* 1953
- b. 3 f. 12      Reviews 1953
- b. 3 f. 13      Photographs 1953
- Boy With a Cart* 1954
- b. 3 f. 14      Reviews 1954
- b. 3 f. 15      Photographs 1954
- b. 3 f. 16      *Family Portrait* - Reviews and playbills 1964
- Absence of a Cello* 1965

Series II: Productions (cont.)

Sub-series 1 - Theater (cont.)

Absence of a Cello (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 1      Reviews and playbills 1965
- b. 4 f. 2      Photographs 1965  
*Oedipus Rex* 1965
- b. 4 f. 3      Reviews and playbills 1965
- b. 4 f. 4      Photographs 1965
- b. 4 f. 5      *Barefoot in the Park - Reviews and playbills* 1967
- b. 4 f. 6      *A Meeting by the River - Reviews* 1972  
*Mornings at Seven* 1976
- b. 4 f. 7      Reviews and playbills 1976
- b. 4 f. 8      Photographs 1976
- b. 4 f. 9      Unidentified photographs 1964, n.d.
- b. 4 f. 10     Identified photographs 1928-1951  
Includes images from *Peter Pan*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Great Big Doorstep* and *The Ivory Door* among others.
- b. 4 f. 11     Reviews 1951, n.d.

Sub-series 2 - Television and Radio 1950-1978 (7 folders)

This sub-series focuses on Friebus' involvement with television. Highlights include photographs and clips on her roles in *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *Peyton Place*, and *The Bob Newhart Show*, and as a children's storyteller on *Look and Listen*. Also included is a folder on her radio work in *The U.S. Steel Theatre Guild of the Air* (Radio program).

- b. 2 f. 5      Original radio script by Friebus for "Alice in Wonderland". Broadcast on Eva Le Gallienne's American Repertory Theater program on August 15, 1933, on WJZ-NY circa 1933
- b. 4 f. 12     *U.S. Steel Theatre Guild on the Air (Radio program) - Playbills* 1951  
*The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis (Television program)* 1959-1963
- b. 4 f. 13      Reviews and manuscript 1963, n.d.
- b. 4 f. 14      Photographs 1959-1963  
*Look and Listen (Television program)* 1960-1962
- b. 4 f. 15      Reviews and profiles 1960-1962
- b. 4 f. 16      Photographs 1960-1962
- b. 4 f. 17      *Peyton Place - photographs* 1964
- b. 4 f. 18      *The Bob Newhart Show - Photographs* 1972-1978
- b. 4 f. 19      Reviews 1950