



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Edwin Justus Mayer papers

1915-1959

*T-Mss 2014-126

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2015

Summary

Creator: Mayer, Edwin Justus, 1896-1960

Title: Edwin Justus Mayer papers

Date: 1915-1959

Size: 8.2 linear feet (20 boxes)

Source: Unknown.

Abstract: Edwin Justus Mayer (1896-1960) was an American screenwriter, playwright, and journalist, most remembered for writing the scripts for two comedies directed by Ernst Lubitsch. The Edwin Justus Mayer papers contain writings and personal files.

Conditions Governing Use: The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Theatre Division at theatre@nypl.org.

Preferred citation: Edwin Justus Mayer papers, *T-Mss 2014-126. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2015

Creator History

Edwin Justus Mayer was born in New York, New York on November 8, 1896. Mayer started his writing career as a journalist, reporting on crime for *The Harlem Home News*. In 1923 he published an autobiography, *A Preface to Life*. Mayer's first play produced on Broadway was *The Firebrand* (1924), a comedy based on the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini. The play was a hit, and in 1934 it was made into a movie under the title *The Affairs of Cellini*. In 1945 Mayer would collaborate on a musical adaptation of the play, *The Firebrand of Florence*, with composer Kurt Weill and lyricist Ira Gershwin. Mayer followed up *The Firebrand* with *Children of Darkness* (1930), which was well-reviewed but a commercial failure. Mayer would continue to write plays for the rest of his life and some were produced regionally, though none were produced on Broadway.

After briefly having worked for Samuel Goldwyn in 1919, Mayer launched his screenwriting career in

1927, providing titles for several silent films over the next few years, including *Hotel Imperial*, *Women Love Diamonds*, *The Devil Dancer*, *The Love Mart*, and *Husbands for Rent* in 1927; *The Whip Woman*, *The Blue Danube*, *Midnight Madness*, *Man-Made Women*, *Sal of Singapore*, *Ned McCobb's Daughter* in 1928; and *The Divine Lady* in 1929. Mayer's first screenplay for a talkie was the thriller *The Unholy Night* (1929).

Mayer continued to write for Hollywood for many years, providing additional dialogue for several early talkies and writing the screenplays for several major films. Some notable films he wrote include *Merrily We Go to Hell* (1932), *Wild Girl* (1932), *Give Us This Night* (1936), *The Buccaneer* (1938), and *They Met in Bombay* (1941). Mayer is perhaps best remembered for the screenplays he wrote for two Ernst Lubitsch films, *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) and *A Royal Scandal* (1945).

Scope and Content Note

The papers of American playwright and screenwriter Edwin Justus Mayer contain writings and personal files.

Writings contain annotated drafts, fragments, outlines, and notes on Mayer's works. Writings include produced and unproduced plays, screenplays, short stories, and poems. Scripts for produced works may include programs, clippings or other production materials. Personal files consist primarily of personal and professional correspondence, insurance policies, wills, a small amount of photographs, and papers from Mayer's 1937 divorce from Frances O'Neill MacIntyre.

Professional correspondence includes letters between Mayer and playwright Elmer Rice; producer Max Gordon; lyricist Lorenz Hart; collaborators such as Kurt Weill; Mayer's manager Audrey Wood; producer Horace Liverlight; publishers Samuel French, Julian Messner, and Harcourt, Brace, and Co.; and Hays, St. John, Abramson & Schulman, a law firm which handled the rights to Mayer's plays. There are folders of correspondence pertaining to many of Mayer's plays, including *The Firebrand of Florence*, *I Am Laughing*, and *Sunrise in My Pocket*. Mayer's film career is documented with correspondence pertaining to salary payments and contractual negotiations with Myron Selznick and Company, Inc. and the John McCormick, Inc. Agency. Some contracts and salary statements are included with correspondence.

Personal correspondence documents Mayer's life and opinions through his letters with family members, including his son, his ex-wife, his sisters Estelle and Olga, friends, and his lover Dorothy Huston. Mayer's letters often offer eloquent insights into current events, including prohibition, the influence of the Holocaust on Jews in America, and the responsibilities of men during wartime. After their divorce, Mayer maintained cordial and affectionate relations with his ex-wife Frances O'Neill MacIntyre. Their correspondence concerns alimony payments; the development, behavior, and education of their son; Mayer's health and work; and the mental health and psychological treatment of Frances Mayer. The file on Mayer's son, Paul Avila Mayer, includes letters he exchanged with his father while studying at the George School and at Harvard University during the 1940s, as well as correspondence between Mayer and doctors, dentists, and his ex-wife pertaining to Paul Mayer. Paul Mayer's report cards from the George School are also included. One folder contains several 1905 notes between Mayer's father, Paul Mayer, and his brother, Oscar Mayer.

Correspondence with Joseph Verner Reed concerns Reed's discussion of Mayer's relationship with the actress May Ellis in Reed's 1935 memoir, *The Curtain Falls*. Mayer's correspondence with novelist Felizia Seyd contains discussions of a trip she took to her home country of Germany during the late 1930s, and the rise of Hitler, the threats to Jews living in Germany, and the attitudes of Americans to

Hitler. There are also several letters to, from, and concerning Mayer's cousin, Dr. Ludwig Thalheimer, regarding Mayer's long (and ultimately unsuccessful) struggle to assist Thalheimer (who had been interned at Dachau) and his family to seek refuge in the United States during World War II. Mayer's correspondence with William Garson, Warren Marsh, and various realtors, furniture sellers, workmen, and insurance agents concerns the purchase, preparation for habitation, grounds maintenance, renovation, repairs, and upkeep of Mayer's house in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Some correspondence is sorted alphabetically by subject or correspondent's name, while there is also a run of correspondence sorted chronologically. There is some overlap of subjects and correspondents between the alphabetically and chronologically arranged correspondence, so researchers should be sure to peruse both sections. Bank books are ledgers which document Mayer's personal expenses from 1931 to 1946 .

Arrangement: The Edwin Justus Mayer papers are arranged in the following sections: Writings, Personal Files, and Bank Books.

Key Terms

Subjects

American drama

Motion pictures -- United States -- 20th century

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

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence

Ledgers

Programs (documents)

Scripts

Occupations

Playwrights

Screenwriters

Writers

Container List

Writings 1920-1949

- b. 1 f. 1 *The Adventurous Soul* undated
- b. 1 f. 2 *Are You Making Any Money* undated
- b. 1 f. 3 *Atlas the Giant* undated
- Ballons*
- b. 1 f. 4-5 undated
- b. 2 f. 1-5 undated
- b. 3 f. 1 *The Best Policy* undated
- b. 3 f. 2-3 *Children of Darkness* 1930
- b. 3 f. 4 *Color in Poetry* undated
- b. 3 f. 5 *The Con Man* undated
- The Death of Don Juan*
- b. 3 f. 6 1941
- b. 4 f. 1-6 1941-1954, undated
- b. 5 f. 1 undated
- b. 5 f. 2 *The Dream* undated
- b. 5 f. 3 *A Farewell Supper* undated
- b. 5 f. 4-6 *The Finishing Touch* undated
- b. 5 f. 7 *The Firebrand*
- b. 5 f. 8 *From My Window* undated
- b. 6 f. 1-4 *The Golden Farce* 1935
- b. 6 f. 5 *The Gypsy Baron* undated
- b. 6 f. 6 *Heaven Forbid* 1927
- b. 7 f. 1-4 *I Am Laughing* 1931
- b. 7 f. 5 *Idyll in Surrey* undated
- b. 7 f. 6 *In a Cafe* undated
- b. 7 f. 7 *In Name Only* undated
- b. 7 f. 8 *Incident on the Border* undated
- b. 7 f. 9 *Interlude* undated
- b. 8 f. 1 *The Last Mask* 1927, 1930
- b. 8 f. 2 *Light* undated
- b. 8 f. 3 *Marriage* undated
- b. 8 f. 4 *The Matchmaker* undated
- b. 8 f. 5 *Max Goes Home* undated
- b. 8 f. 6 *The Merry Man Who Killed Himself* undated
- b. 8 f. 7-8 *The Mountain Top* 1921-1927
- b. 9 f. 1 *Mr. and Mrs. Grundy in Moscow* undated
- b. 9 f. 2 *Murder in the Last Chapter* undated
- b. 9 f. 3 *My Cousin from Warsaw* undated

Writings (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 4 *My Own Murder Story* undated
- b. 9 f. 5-7 *A Night at Madame Tussaud's* 1949
- b. 9 f. 8 *Peter* undated
- b. 9 f. 9 *Poor Sap* 1936, 1938
- b. 10 f. 1 *Queen of Hearts* 1947-1948
- b. 10 f. 2 *Rendezvous* undated
- b. 10 f. 3 *Scott Fitzgerald* undated
- b. 10 f. 4 *The Secret of the Night* undated
- b. 10 f. 5 *The Speaker's Table* undated
- b. 10 f. 6 *Stagestruck* undated
- b. 10 f. 7 *The Status Quo* 1931
- b. 10 f. 8 *Studies in Cold Type* undated
- b. 10 f. 9 *Sunrise in My Pocket* undated
- b. 10 f. 10 *TEA* 1920
- b. 10 f. 11 *Their Good Name* 1929
- b. 11 f. 1 *Things as They Are* 1931
- b. 11 f. 2 *Thrifty Souls* undated
- b. 11 f. 3 *Thru the Telephone* undated
- b. 11 f. 4-5 *The Turn of the Century* undated
- b. 11 f. 6 *Two Men Concerned with Destiny* undated
- b. 11 f. 7 *Underground* undated
- b. 11 f. 8 *The Vamp* undated
- b. 11 f. 9 *Viola* undated
- b. 12 f. 1 *Who Is Sylvia?* undated
- b. 12 f. 2 *Poems* 1936-1947
- b. 12 f. 3-5 *Short Pieces, Fragments, and Unidentified Works* undated

Personal Files 1915-1959

- b. 13 f. 1-2 *Clippings* 1924-1952

Correspondence

Alphabetical Run 1923-1952

- b. 13 f. 3-34 Ames, Bee - Garson, William E
- b. 14 f. 1-42 Glaenzer, Richard Butler - Mayer, Frances
- b. 15 f. 1-7 Mayer, Israel - Mayer, Paul Avila
- b. 16 f. 1-24 *Mayer, Stella - Sunrise in My Pocket*
- b. 17 f. 1-12 Sutfin, W. Sterling - Young, Joy

Chronological Run

- b. 17 f. 13-17 1915-1942
- b. 18 f. 1-2 1943-1959, undated
- b. 18 f. 3 Divorce Papers 1937
- b. 18 f. 4-6 Insurance Policies 1927-1943
- b. 18 f. 7 Legal Papers 1942

Personal Files (cont.)

- b. 18 f. 8 Passport 1923
- b. 18 f. 9 Programs 1924-1952
- b. 18 f. 10 Receipted Bills 1936-1948
- b. 19 f. 1 Other Personal Files 1921, undated

Bank Books

- b. 19 f. 2-6 1931-1941
- b. 20 f. 1-3 1943-1946