



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Philadelphia Theater Plat Book

NMAH.AC.1318

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

2016

Archives Center, National Museum of American History
P.O. Box 37012
Suite 1100, MRC 601
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012
archivescenter@si.edu
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Philadelphia Theater Plat Book
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1318
Date:	1911-1913, undated
Extent:	0.25 Cubic feet (1 box)
Creator:	Simonson, Frank See, Wayne
Language:	English
Summary:	Theater plat book used at the Philadelphia Theater in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania showing stage plats for various productions.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian by Wayne See in May 2014.

Provenance

In 1981, the volume was being discarded by Local 8 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and the donor, Wayne See, saved it. He donated it to the Archives Center in 2014.

Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archivist, 2016; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Philadelphia Theater Plat Book, 1911-1913, undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Frank Simonson was born in April 1879 in New York, New York, the son of George and Harriet Hunter Simonson. George was a carpenter and his son presumably learned the trade from him. The family lived in East Rockaway, Queens until 1900 when upon George's death, they moved to Palmer Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On August 23, 1902 he married Mabel Matheys, the daughter of Thomas and Sarah Warley Matheys in Manhattan, New York. The Simonsons first lived on Gordon Street in Philadelphia, but by 1920 they had moved to East Dauphin Street. He and his wife appear to have had no children.

Simonson was a charter member of the local chapter of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). He built sets for several Philadelphia theaters, including the Arch Street Theater, Standard Theater, Forrest Theater, Kensington Theater, American Theater, and the Wilmington Theater. In the 1900 United States Census Simonson listed his occupation as "stage carpenter". In the 1906-1907 *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide* Simonson is listed as "prop man" for the Standard Theater. In the 1909-1910 edition of the Cahn guide he is listed at the same theater as a "stage carpenter". Simonson's plat book was started in 1911 while he was employed at the American Theater, Philadelphia. By the 1940 Census Simonson was listed as "installing sound equipment" in the Metropolitan Opera House in Philadelphia where he was listed as part of the technical staff. Simonson died on August 18, 1958 and was buried in Oakland Cemetery, Philadelphia.

The plat book was obtained by Wayne See in 1981 when IATSE (Local 8) was vacating its offices at 1720 Delancey Street in Philadelphia.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of one item, a theater plat book compiled by Frank Simonson, a stage carpenter, containing design drawings and placement for stage sets for a variety of plays. The volume includes not only diagrams for the placement of flats and platforms, furniture, and props but also includes elevation renderings for a small number of plays. The plats are not always dated and contain little information other than dimensions and placement of sets, flats, and furniture. The volume illustrates a wide range of the sometimes simple, sometimes elaborate, sets employed in the theater of the early 20th century.

Series 1, Theater Plat Book, 1911-1913, undated The volume was begun in 1911 when Frank Simonson was employed at the American Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 1913 is the latest date found in this plat book. A list of plays appears at the beginning of the volume, and the designs are indexed. The volume contains set diagrams for many popular and now obscure plays including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lena Rivers*, George M. Cohan's *Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway*, *Jane Eyre*, *Secret Service*, *The Squaw Man*, and many others. The volume is indexed and contains plats and/or renderings for 152 plays.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into one series.

Series 1: Theater Plat Book, 1911-1913, undated

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Stagecraft
Stagehands
Theater
Vaudeville

Types of Materials:

Design drawings
Plat books

Names:

American Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Philadelphia (Pa.)
Arch Street Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Philadelphia (Pa.)
Forrest Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Philadelphia (Pa.)
Kensington Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Philadelphia (Pa.)
See, Wayne
Standard Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Philadelphia (Pa.)
Wilmington Theatre -- Geographic subdivision--Wilmington (Del.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Theater Plat Book, 1911-1913, undated

Box 1

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