Guide to the Bessie Schönberg (1906-1997) Papers RG 10.14

Finding aid prepared by Mary Reynolds, Lea Osborne, and Sarah Pinard

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December 20, 2017

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Sarah Lawrence College Archives July 1999, May 2004, March 2011 Sarah Lawrence College Archives 1 Mead Way Bronxville, NY, 10708 914-395-2480 archives@sarahlawrence.edu

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Summary Information

Repository Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Creator Schonberg, Bessie

Title Bessie Schönberg (1906-1997) Papers

Date [bulk] Bulk, 1946-1974

Date [inclusive] 1930-1999

Extent 7.0 linear feet 6 record cartons, 1 letter half box, 1 flat box

Language English

Biographical note

Bessie Schönberg was born in 1906 in Hanover, Germany. Arriving in the United States when she was 17 years old, she began her undergraduate career at the University of Oregon in Eugene, but moved to New York in 1929 to study with Martha Graham. In 1931, she suffered a knee injury preventing her from pursuing her dance career and subsequently attended Bennington College where she received her B.A. in 1934. She immediately became a dance instructor at Bennington after graduating and taught there until 1938 when she began teaching at Sarah Lawrence College. She remained at Sarah Lawrence College for 37 years until her retirement in 1975. Bessie, as she was known on campus, is credited with establishing the Dance Department at the College and received national attention for her dance composition classes. She became a part of every aspect of Sarah Lawrence, not only dance instruction. Upon her retirement, she was appointed Professor Emerita and in 1993, the Bessie Schönberg Dance Theatre at the College was named in her honor. Throughout her post-retirement years, she was closely connected with the Dance Theater Workshop (which named its theatre in Chelsea for Bessie), The Yard, and Jacob's Pillow. The distinguished New York Dance and Performance Awards were named the "Bessies" in her honor. After retiring, she continued to teach at the Juilliard School, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and the Dance Theatre of Harlem until her death. Bessie Schönberg died at her home in Bronxville on May 14, 1997.

Scope and Contents note

The Bessie Schönberg Papers are a collection of administrative and personal materials created and accumulated over Schönberg's lifetime and more specifically during her tenure at Sarah Lawrence College. The papers consist of documents from 1930 to 1999, however the bulk of the records date from 1946 to 1974. Photographs are located in the Photograph Collection.

The Bessie Schönberg Papers are organized in five series:

Series I. Biographical Records, 1930-1999

Series II. Correspondence, 1946-1997

Series III. College Affairs, 1938-1997

Series IV. Dance and Theatre Departments, 1938-1996

Series V. Performances, 1940-1986

The biographical records outline Bessie Schönberg's life and work beginning with clippings about guest recitals she performed on campus before becoming a faculty member and ending with tributes held in her honor after her death. Basic biographical information and her oral history are also located in this series.

An entire sub-series is committed to tributes and memorials given upon her retirement from the College in 1975 and her death in 1997. This sub-series also includes materials about theatre dedications.

The correspondence files, which consist of letters between Schönberg and alumni, faculty and administration, and other individuals, is the largest series in the collection. Many of these files are restricted.

The majority of administrative records in this collection are located in the College Affairs series. Of particular note are the administrative memos and correspondence between Schönberg and the Office of the President, the Office of the Dean of the College and staff and faculty. There is also correspondence regarding presidential searches that took place from 1943 to 1945 and 1967 to 1968.

Of note in the Dance and Theatre Departments series are folders about the Children's Theatre, male students in graduate programs, and correspondence regarding construction of the Performing Arts Center. The curriculum sub-series includes course and workshop schedules. There is also a folder of correspondence about course offerings and training in ballet on campus. A significant number of Bessie Schönberg's composition notebooks for dance can be found in the courses sub-series. The Student Materials sub-series houses student papers, letters of recommendations and faculty reports, all of which are restricted. Of administrative note are the enrollment statistics, plan of study, and course schedules, all of which are open to researchers.

Notable items in the Performances series include the collection of music, dance, theatre, and opera performance programs. There are also a number of production notebooks that provide invaluable details on the planning and presentation of productions under Bessie Schönberg's leadership.

Series Description

Series I. Biographical Records

This series contains biographical information and material in the form of clippings, published interviews, articles authored by Bessie Schönberg, correspondence about her oral history, awards received, her faculty information sheet, obituaries, and materials from tributes given in Bessie Schönberg's honor. There is also a folder that contains correspondence and obituaries about Dimitry Varley, Schönberg's husband. The series is arranged into four sub-series: Sub-series A. Archives, Sub-series B. Biography, Sub-series C. Publicity, and Sub-series D. Tributes.

Series II. Correspondence

The majority of the writing in this series is personal correspondence, especially that between Schönberg and alumni. Personal and professional correspondence can be found in the faculty files. This series is arranged into three sub-series: Sub-series A. Alumni, Sub-series B. Faculty/Staff/Administration, and Sub-series C. General. Folders are arranged alphabetically by last name within sub-series.

Series III. College Affairs

The majority of the papers in this series are administrative reflecting the sub-series in which they are arranged. Board of Trustee material ranges from reports and presentations to correspondence between the Trustees and the administration and faculty. Materials from the President's Office include year-end reports, memos to and from faculty, and letters directly to Bessie Schönberg. Papers from the Deans' Office reflect administrative operations. This includes correspondence between the administration and faculty, committees, and department chairs. Reports, studies, and limited personal correspondence can also be found here. The faculty and staff files in this series contain correspondence about work-related matters and are professional in nature. Committee folders house the correspondence between various committees and Bessie Schönberg, particularly in her role as a representative of the dance faculty group and during her tenures on committees such as Graduate Studies, General Committee, Student Work, and Admissions.

This series is arranged into 5 sub-series: Sub-series A. Board of Trustees, Sub-series B. Office of the President, Sub-series C. Office of the Dean of the College, Sub-series D. Faculty and Staff, and Sub-series E. Committees.

Series IV. Dance and Theatre Departments

This series contains records directly related to Bessie Schönberg's role in the dance and theatre departments and includes budget materials, curricular and course information, administrative correspondence, scholarship material, and student materials.

The Student Materials sub-series contains class lists, statistics, student papers and worksheets. Faculty reports and letters of recommendation are also in this sub-series. Some of the student material is restricted. These folders are labeled as such.

This series is arranged into six sub-series: Sub-series A. Budget, Sub-series B. Correspondence, Sub-series C. Curriculum, Sub-series D. Courses, Sub-series E. Scholarships, and Sub-series F. Student Materials.

Series V. Performances

The final series is arranged into four sub-series: Sub-series A. General, Sub-series B. Productions, Sub-series C. Programs, and Sub-series D. Speeches. The Productions sub-series has a number of production notebooks including performances of Hansel und Gretel (1943), Beggar on Horseback (1940), and the Triumph of Joan (1950). Programs for Hits and Misses, Music, Opera, Dance and Theatre Workshops, Performing Arts Week, and other performances are housed in the programs sub-series.

Administrative Information	

Publication Information

Sarah Lawrence College Archives July 1999, May 2004, March 2011

Revision Description

Finding Aid entered in Archivists' Toolkit by Stephanie Olaru. June 2014

Conditions Governing Access note

All administrative records are closed for 20 years from the date of creation. All chronological correspondence is restricted indefinitely and may be viewed by special request to the Archivist. Partially restricted folders are labeled as such and are usually restricted for 75 years from the date of creation or death of the individual(s) mentioned. For futher information, see the Archivist.

Acquisition note

This collection was donated to the Sarah Lawrence College Archives in 1999 by Pat Martine, Bessie Schönberg's niece. Portions of accession 2011-006 were added to the collection in August 2011 by Abby Lester.

Processing Information note

Processed July 1999 by Mary Reynolds. Papers updated in May 2004 by Lea Osborne. Finding aid revised in March 2011 by Sarah Pinard.

Related Materials

See also

Theatre Programs for additional SLC production programs; Dance Program Records for other programs and event files; various President's Papers and Dean of the College Records for additional correspondence and administrative records; the Board of Trustee Records for committee material, discussion about the Children's Theatre, and Bessie Schönberg's naming as faculty emerita; Bessie Schönberg's faculty file for personnel material; the Photograph Collection; the Audio Visual Collection for an interview by Rose Anne Thom; the Oral History Collection for a transcript of Schönberg's oral history.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Bessie Awards.
- Sarah Lawrence College. Alumni and alumnae.

Genre(s)

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Curricula
- dance programs
- Memorials
- Oral Histories (Document Genres)

Personal Name(s)

- Adams, Carolyn
- Childs, Lucinda
- Cunningham, Merce
- Cutler, Cheryl
- DeCarlo, Charles R.
- Erdman, Jean
- Gurganus, Allan, 1947-
- Harley, Margot
- Ilchman, Alice Stone, 1935-2006
- Raushenbush, Esther
- Taylor, Harold, 1914-1993
- Tweed, Harrison, 1885-1969
- Ward, Paul L., 1911-2005
- Warren, Constance, 1880-1971

Subject(s)

- Dance--History
- Dance--Study and teaching
- Modern dance
- Theatre studies

Collection Inventory

Series I. Biographical Records 1930-1999		
Sub-series A. Archives		
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Bessie Schönberg Dance Collection, SLC Library 1976-1982	1	1
Bessie Schönberg Papers, Norton Owen, Executor 1997	1	2
Articles written by Bessie Schönberg 1952-1981	1	3
Awards (includes material on the "Bessies") 1982-1985, 1988-1989, 1993	1	4
Sub-series B. Biography		
	Carton	Folder
Biographical Material 1956-1986, 1993	1	5
Faculty Information Sheet (includes Faculty ID) 1969-1970	1	6
Oral History – Correspondence 1978-1997	1	7
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Oral History transcript housed in Oral History Collection		
Dimitry Varley 1984	1	8
Bessie Schönberg Obituaries 1997, 1999	1	9
Sub-series C. Publicity		
	Carton	Folder
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SLC Newsletters 1949-1971	1	11
Published Interviews 1962-1994	1	12
Sub-series D. Tributes		
	Carton	Folder
Alumni Concert in Honor of Bessie Schönberg's Retirement 1972	1	13
"Thank You Bessie": Correspondence 1975	1	14
"Thank You Bessie": Binder (includes correspondence) 1975	1	15
"Thank You Bessie": Program 1975	1	16

"Dear Bessie," Theatre Dedication: Program and Publicity 1993	1	18
"Dancing Since Bessie The World of Sarah Lawrence Dancers," Alvin Ailey Dance Center 1995	1	19
"A Gathering For Bessie," The Joyce Theater 1997	1	20
"Remembering Bessie" Memorial 1997	1	21
"Bessie: A Portrait of Bessie Schönberg," The Kitchen 1999	1	22
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Becton, Lizabeth (Cronenberg) '74 1974	1	30
Beeson, Miranda '75 1975	1	31
Bennion, Barbara (Friedlich) '51 1953-1984	1	32
Bergfeld, Kristin '66 1974	1	33
Berman, Cassia [Beverly] '70 1967-1971	1	34
Bernhardt, Elise '78 1984-1991	1	35
Bernstein, Carol (Clark) '69 1988	1	36
Birjandi, Mehrak [Miki] (Liszt) '66 1966-1996	1	37
Bitner, Martha (Strain) '67 1968-1970	1	38
Blinder, Ethelyn (Honig) '55 1956	1	39
Bowers, Martha '76 1975-1994	1	40
Brandt, Thomas Christopher '73 1970	1	41
Brin, Judith (Ingber) '67 1972-1987	1	42

Brody, Susan '71 1972	1	43
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Budding, Jeanne (Cousins) '43 1964	1	46
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Byman, Luba (Staller) '55 Undated	1	48
Carter, Carol Ann '73 1971-1974	1	49
Chase, Sonia (Hodson) '42 1996	1	50
Childs, Lucinda '62 1962-1987	1	51
Choate, Deborah (Thomas) '49 1950	1	52
Chun, Cynthia '73 1972	1	53
Collins, Elizabeth '81 1979	1	54
Collins, Marilyn (Russo) '75 1976	1	55
Craige, Bette '40 1994	1	56

Crosby, Mary (Stevens) '55 1952-1984	1	57
Crum, Patricia (Bosworth) '55 1957, 1980	1	58
Cutler, Cheryl '68 1980-1996	1	59
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Davidow, Lissabeth '75 1975-1997	1	66
Davis, Carol (Teten) '61 1964-1995	1	67
Davis, Carol (Teten) '61 1964-1995	1	66
Demby, Susan (Driesen) '54 1969	1	69
Desylva, Leonore (Russell) '68 1968	1	70

Donnelly, Laura '69 1982-1984	1	71
Donohue, Jennifer (Zakkai) '72 1969-1997	1	72
Donohue, Jennifer (Zakkai) '72 1969-1997	1	73
Dover, Pamela (Finney) '65 1961-1984	1	74
Eginton, Margaret '77 1974-1996	1	75
Eiler, April '64 1964	1	76
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Ervin, Lauri '72 1970	1	78
Everett, Karen (Millet) '79 1974	1	79
Fairbank, Holly Cannon '76 1974-1993	1	80
Farnsworth, Dede '78 1975	1	81
Ferguson, Mary (Taft) '60 1981	1	82
Fidao, Wendy '64 1964	1	83
Fischer-Braun, Gisela '51 1957-1991	1	84

Fishbein, Lauren J., Esq. '82 1981	1	85
Fitzpatrick, Sara Ann [Sally] (Haynes) '52 1953-1984	1	86
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Frank, Susan (Stern) '46 1946-1981	1	90
Friess, Anne '51 1947-1951	1	91
Fuerst, Lenore (Broeg) '49 1949	1	92
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Gebelein, June (Finch) '61 1962-1974	2	2
Gholson, Eva '72 1973-1996	2	3
Goetz, Dandra (Ragsdale) '73 1972-1974	2	4
Goodkin, Virginia (Matthews) '71 1954-1992	2	5
Griffin, Joan '69 1978	2	6

Gundlach, Heidi '77 1976-1996	2	7
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Heidenkamp, Virginia (Neurath) '48 1954	2	12
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Heller, Suzanne (Ettlinger) '46 1947-1993	2	14
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Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 Undated	2	17
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1953	2	18
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1956	2	19
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1957	2	20

Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1957	2	21
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1958	2	22
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1958	2	23
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1959	2	24
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1959	2	25
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1959	2	26
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1960	2	27
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1960	2	28
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1961	2	29
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1961	2	30
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1962	2	31
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1964	2	32
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1969	2	33
Harley, Margot (Holdstein) '57 1973-1976	2	34

Harley, Margot (Holdstein)'57 1981-1985	2	35
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Holton, Patricia (Morris) '45 1962-1968	2	37
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Hutchins, Jeanne '72 1970-1994	2	40
Jackson, Etta Jean '75 1972	2	41
Johnson, Moira (Logan) '72 1972-1988	2	42
Jordan, Sue '76 1976	2	43
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Korty, Carol (Tweedie) '66: Score For May Fest 1971	2	51
Korty, Carol (Tweedie) '66: Silly Soup 1966	2	52
Korty, Carol (Tweedie) '66: The Shape We're In 1969	2	53
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Lewis, Carole Ann '59 1957-1972	2	59
Leyden, Heather (Tuck) '70 1974-1988	2	60
Lindsey, Linda (Ellis) '73 1972	2	61

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Markham, Shelley '64	2	63
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Mayo, Phyllis (Spott) '46 1969	2	66
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McFerren, Susan (Gunn) '64 1969	2	68
McNamara, Catherine '76 1975-1986	2	69
Meade, Elyzabeth Ely '83 1984-1986	3	1
Miller, Judith (Babcock) '58 1976	3	2
Moehlenkamp, Betty '68 1974	3	3
Monk, Meredith '64 1972-1996	3	4
Monk, Meredith '64 1963-1969	3	5
Monk, Meredith '64 Undated	3	6

Morris, Naomi (Lown) '56 1973	3	7
Morris, Patricia (Holton) '45 Undated, 1968-1997	3	8
Muther, Catherine Stevenson '69 1996	3	9
Neirinck, James '68 1969-1970	3	10
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Norton, Mary (Shands) '53 Undated	3	12
Novey, Irene '64 1963	3	13
O'Brien, Kathleen (Muirhead) '53 1950	3	14
Packer, Idelle '71 1972-1976	3	15
Parrish, Susan (Cowley) '66 1964-1975	3	16
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Phillips, Joan (Stone) '61 1975	3	19
Pier, Virginia '76 1974-1977	3	20

Pierpont, Margaret '73 1971-1975	3	21
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Raven, Yolanda '72 1974	3	25
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Slomoff, Judith (Green-Loose) '63 1964	3	41
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Spalding, Murray '66 1971-1996	3	43
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Steinberg, Judy '62 Undated, 1986, 1993	3	45
Stern, Gloria (Kisch) '63 1969	3	46
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Sugihara, Sara '75 1973	3	49
Swartz, Susan (Painter) '64 1967	3	50
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Tropp, Judith '72 1970	3	55
Udren, Sharon (Chaiklin) '55 1972-1995	3	56
Vogel, Laura (Pawel) '68 1974-1976	3	57
Vorspan, Roberta (Lynch) '73 1971	3	58
Wallace, Carol (Sherman) '58 1957-1988	3	59
Wattenberg, Anne '76 1970-1978	3	60
Weinstein, Cliff '72 1981	3	61
Williams, Penelope Ann (Best) '69 1969-1970	3	62

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Haines, Edmund 1996	3	90
Harrison, Joan 1987-1989	3	91
Held, Janet 1984	3	92
Hinkson, Mary 1972	3	93
Horst, Louis Undated	3	94
Ilchman, Alice Undated, 1997	3	95
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RESTRICTED

See Archivist for futher information.

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Sub-series A. Board of Trustees Board of Trustees 1958-1970	4	1
Sub-series A. Board of Trustees Board of Trustees 1958-1970 DeMille, Agnes, Trustee 1952-1955	4	1

Taylor, Harold 1959-1966	4	4
Taylor, Harold 1955-1959	4	5
Taylor, Harold 1950-1955	4	6
Taylor, Harold 1946-1949	4	7
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Ilchman, Alice 1984-1997	4	14
Sub-series C. Office of the Dean of the College		
	Carton	Folder
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