Federal Theatre Project collection
018.FTP

Finding aid prepared by Elizabeth Searls

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit
October 02, 2013
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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Summary Information

Repository  Eastern Michigan University Archives

Title  Federal Theatre Project collection

Date [inclusive]  1935-1939

Extent  8.4 Linear feet 8 record center cartons, 1 archive box

Language  English

Abstract  In 1935, as part of the WPA the Federal Theatre Project was created to employ theatre professionals during the Great Depression. The Federal Theatre Project collection documents the project through the scripts, publications and written histories of the project. The collection is divided into four series of records: Administrative and History, Individual Role Scripts, Publications, and Radio Scripts and arranged alphabetically within the series. The records date from 1935 to 1939 when the program was disbanded.

Preferred Citation note

Please cite materials from the University Archives in the following manner: Item. Collection Title. Eastern Michigan University Archives.
Administrative History

The Federal Theatre Project was established on August 29, 1935 by the Works Progress Administration. The Great Depression had left millions unemployed with theatre professionals being hit especially hard at this time not only by the economic depression, but also by the development of films and radio.

The aim of the Federal Theatre Project was to employ theatre professionals in socially useful projects that would utilize their skills and at the same time bring theatre to thousands of American citizens who could no longer afford going to the theatre. This was done by means of radio performances, editing of scripts, and playwriting. At its peak the Federal Theatre Project employed almost 13,000 people.

Following a series of controversial investigations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Subcommittee on Appropriations regarding the Federal Theatre’s outspoken leftist commentary on social and economic issues, the Federal Theatre Project was terminated in 1939 by congressional action.

Scope and Contents

The Federal Theatre Project collection contains information on the project history, radio scripts and publications including production lists and theatrical techniques. The collection is divided into four series and arranged alphabetically within each. Records date from 1935 to 1939.

The four series that are included in the collection are: Administration and History, Individual Role Scripts, Publications and Radio Scripts.

The Publications series includes eight sub-series of cultural plays, folk songs, holiday plays, musicals, non-royalty plays, operettas, patriotic plays religious plays. The Radio Scripts series includes forty-one sub-series most commonly titled by the production title. These sub-series are: Backstage Interviews, Choral Contrasts, Detective O'Malley, Drums, Elizabethan Dramas, Epic of America, Experiments in Symphonic Drama, Exploring the Arts and Sciences, Exploring the Seven Arts, Federal Theatre of Air, Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Program, History in Action, Home Town, Isben Cycle, Jewish Theatre of Air, Jules Verne, King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table, Makers of Dreams, Men Against Death, New York Panorama, Once Upon A Time, Operettas, Oscar Wilde Cycle, Out of the Hall of Records, Pals of the P.A.L., Pickwick Papers, Pioneers of Science, Portraits in Oil, Repertory Theatre of Air, Short Stories, Social Security Board, Special Events, Story of Swing, Symphonic Dramas, Their Greatest Stories, There's A Law Against It!, This Was News, Tish, United States Housing Authority, What Good Is Art?, and Women in the Making of America.

The provenance of the collection is undocumented and it is unclear from the collection record what if any connection there was between the Michigan State Normal College and the Federal Theatre Project.
Administrative Information

Publication Information
Eastern Michigan University Archives 2012 November 26

Revision Description
Revisions made by Alexis Braun Marks, University Archivist 2013 October 2

Conditions Governing Access note
Researchers are asked to request materials 24 hours prior to visiting the the University Archives.

Controlled Access Headings

Subject(s)

• Federal Theatre Project (U.S.)
# Collection Inventory

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**Patriotic Holiday Plays 1937**

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### Green Paint 1939
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### Too Clever 1939
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### United States Housing Authority

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What Good Is Art?

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Women in the Making of America

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