

Laurette Taylor:

A Preliminary Inventory of Her Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Taylor, Laurette, 1884-1946
Title:	Laurette Taylor Papers
Dates:	1907-1959
Extent:	3 boxes (3.3 linear feet)
Abstract:	Included in this actress's papers are correspondence, personal and theater photographs, photograph albums, press reviews, articles, and legal documents, as well as writings by others.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-04170
Language:	English
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Reg. No. 13416
Processed by	Liz Murray, 1995
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Scope and Contents

This small, but significant collection contains material from Laurette Taylor's early acting days, ca. 1907, through her retirement years to her glorious return to the stage in her legendary performances of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) by Tennessee Williams. Her career spanned the era of vaudeville and silent film to the war years of the mid-1940s. Included in this collection are correspondence, personal and theater photographs, photograph albums, press reviews, articles, legal documents, and contracts. Also included are writings of her son, Dwight Taylor, as well as papers and works of her second husband, J. Hartley Manners, the playwright whose partnership accounted for her early roles. Unfortunately, in contrast to Taylor's prolific professional life, little remains to document her career. According to her daughter, Marguerite Courtney, Laurette destroyed all press books, letters, programs, photograph albums, and other memorabilia associated with her life with Manners upon his death in 1928. Her most significant work during this time was her highly successful and long-running portrayal of Peg in *Peg O' My Heart*, written by Manners and produced in New York and London. For approximately a decade after her husband's death, Taylor retired from the stage, suffering with bouts of depression and alcoholism.

Correspondence consists of Laurette's letters to Dwight Taylor documenting her financial hardships, her tremendous success with *The Glass Menagerie*, including mention of Tennessee Williams, and her failing health beginning in 1945. Dwight's childhood letters chronicle his private school years and accompany typescript memories of his life with his famous mother. Correspondents also include John Barrymore, Booth Tarkington, James Cagney, and George Cukor.

Newspaper reviews cover Taylor's plays in the late 1930s, extensive coverage of *The Glass Menagerie*, and numerous obituaries. A large number of publicity and personal photographs are present, documenting her characters in plays such as *The Bird of Paradise*, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, *Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire*, *Outward Bound*, *One Night in Rome*, *Humoresque*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. A charming remnant of her many awards is the hand-lettered Barter Theatre Award presented by Eleanor Roosevelt in May 1939 for Taylor's portrayal of Mrs. Midget in *Outward Bound*. The award provides Miss Taylor with "one acre of land on the side of a mountain near Abingdon, Virginia" and "one sugar-cured Virginia ham."

Estate papers of J. Hartley Manners are included as well as a clothbound typescript edition of his 1920 play *One Night in Rome*, prepared for the farewell performance at the Garrick Theatre.

A number of published works and recordings were transferred to the HRHRC book collection. Included in this group are Laurette Taylor's *The Greatest of These.....*; *Peg O' My Heart*, *Happiness and Other Plays*, *The Harp of Life*, and *The National Anthem* by J. Hartley Manners; and *Blood & Thunder* and *Joy Ride* by Dwight Taylor. Taylor's recordings, mostly 78 RPM, include music cues for *The Glass Menagerie* (1945); a 1939 WJZ radio broadcast of *Peg O' My Heart*; *Among My Souvenirs* (1943); a segment of *We The People* (1945); a Rudy Vallee radio program (1939); and a very early 1913

voice recording trial done of Laurette Taylor in New York.

This collection received minimal rehousing, retaining the original annotated folders and document groupings. Some preservation photocopying was provided for fragile newspaper reviews.

See also Marguerite Courtney's biography, *Laurette: The Intimate Biography of Laurette Taylor*. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1955. (HRC PN 2287.T25.C6.1955c)

Series I. Correspondence

L.T. letters to Dwight Taylor, 1930s-1940s

**box 1 folder
1**

L.T. letters to Dwight Taylor, re: *Glass Menagerie*, 1945-46.

folder 2

General correspondence re: *Glass Menagerie* and two play programs

folder 3

John Barrymore (1933) and Booth Tarkington (1914) letters to L.T.

folder 4

Series II. Press

Obits and play reviews [oversize material removed to Oversize Flat Files]

box 1
folder
5

"Portraits of Laurette Taylor" by Norris Houghton, *Theatre Arts*, December 1945

folder 6

The Glass Menagerie reviews

folder 7

Series III. Legal Documents

Divorce papers (Taylor vs. Taylor) and L.T. Estate Probate

box 1
folder 8

Peg `O My Heart contracts

folder 9

Series IV. Dwight Taylor

Peg `O My Heart correspondence, 1948-1959

box 1
folder 10

D.T. letters to L.T., 1917-1939

folder 11

Edited typescripts "My Mother and I"

folder
12

Typescript fragments of D.T. stories about L.T.

folder 13

Famous Writers School: "Meet your instructor... Dwight Taylor"

folder 14

Typescripts of D.T. poems and ms. of one act play "Marriage: A Tragedy"

folder
15

Series V. John Hartley Manners

Biographical information

box 1 folder 16

Estate Papers

folder 17

One Night in Rome, clothbound typescript with photographs, July 31, 1920 [104th and
farewell performance at Garrick Theatre]

**folder
18**

Series VI. Photographs

Theatrical and personal photographs, 1910-1946, photograph of Zoë Akins; Barter Theatre Award [oversize matted photograph of L.T. removed to Oversize Flat Files] **box**
2

Photograph album of L.T. in plays, circa 1907, and family photos **box**
3

Photograph album including photos of Dwight Taylor as a small boy with L.T. and other family photos; photos of L.T. from her earliest acting days through the 1930s, some annotated by L.T.