

Samuel French, Inc.:

An Inventory of Its Correspondence in the Performing Arts Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Samuel French, Inc., 1830-
Title:	Samuel French, Inc. Correspondence
Dates:	1949
Extent:	2 document boxes (0.84 linear feet)
Abstract:	Founded by Samuel French (1821-1898) in New York City in 1846, Samuel French, Inc. is the largest and oldest publisher and supplier of plays for amateur and stock theatre in the world. The Samuel French, Inc. correspondence includes almost 300 typed letters, cables, and some clippings exchanged during 1949 between the two branches of the company across the Atlantic. Among the plays referred to in the correspondence are Tennessee Williams's <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> , Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i> , Noel Coward's <i>Private Lives</i> , and Anton Chekhov's <i>The Sea Gull</i> .
RLIN Record #:	TXRC06-A13
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase of W. H. "Deacon" Crain
Processed by:	Antonio Alfau, 2006
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Organizational History

Founded by Samuel French (1821-1898) in New York City in 1846, Samuel French, Inc. is the largest and oldest publisher and supplier of plays for amateur and stock theatre in the world. Moreover, the company also serves as a licensing agent for performance rights and runs a theatrical bookshop.

Samuel French started his business reprinting and selling inexpensive editions of popular novels. He began publishing plays in 1854, including his famous *French's American Drama*, which later he divided and renamed *French's Standard Drama* and *French's Minor Drama*. These acting editions included detailed stage directions and information on scenery, props, and other matters. By 1856, he was advertising that he had 100,000 plays available, including the first editions of *Uncle Tom* by George L. Aiken (1858) and Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857).

In 1859, French and Thomas Hailes Lacy, the leading British publisher of plays and publisher of *Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays*, became partners acting as representatives of each other on both sides of the ocean. In 1872, Samuel French left his son Thomas Henry French in charge of his business and moved to London, strengthening his association with Lacy. After Lacy retired, the elder French bought his company for 5,000 pounds, becoming the most important theatrical publisher in Great Britain. Lacy had started his business in 1830, which is the year that Samuel French Inc. now gives as its foundation date. In London, French started collecting royalties from professional and amateur performers of his company's plays, a practice that continues today.

Under the direction of Cyril Hogg, Samuel French Inc. expanded its business to related fields of the play publishing industry. They bought the costumers B. J. Simmons and Charles H. Fox; hat and cap makers A. and L. Corne; the armorer and jeweler Robert White; Fashion Hire, a company that supplied modern day costumes; and Stage Scenery, a firm that supplied stage settings on a rental basis. The company later sold all of these ancillary agencies to concentrate on its original business, and as of 2006 it continues as the leading publisher of plays and licensor of performance rights in the world, with offices in major English-speaking cities.

Sources:

"Samuel French". *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed March 2006).

Truly Yours: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Play Publishing and Service to the Theatre (London: French, 1980).

Scope and Contents

The Samuel French, Inc. correspondence includes almost 300 typed letters, cables, and some clippings exchanged during 1949 between the two branches of the company across the Atlantic. The majority of the letters were written by Harold F. Dyer and Cyril W. Hogg from the London branch, and by Abbot van Nostrand and J. Frank Stephens of the New York City office; other letters were written by employees of the company, and people related to the business. The correspondence is arranged in a single chronological series, and a complete index follows the folder list.

Most of the correspondence is of a routine nature: comments and inquiries about plays, publishing, playwrights, licensing of plays, copyrights, performing fees, and royalties. Sometimes the letters comment upon other subjects such as the difficulties of dealing with certain playwrights, or about some producers and "pirate" theater companies that performed plays without having the rights or paying the fees.

Among the plays referred to in the correspondence are Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes*, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Edward Sheldon's *Romance*, W. Somerset Maugham's *The Constant Wife*, Paul Kester's adaptation of *Tom Sayers*, Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, and Anton Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*.

Index Terms

People

Dyer, Harold F.
Hogg, Cyril W.
Stephens, J. Frank.
Van Nostrand, M. Abbott.

Subjects

Drama--Publishing.
Publishers and publishing--England--London--History.
Publishers and publishing--New York (State)--New York--History.
Theatrical publishing--History.

Document Types

Correspondence.

Series I. Correspondence, 1949

January	Box 1 Folder 1
February	Folder 2
March	Folder 3
April	Folder 4
May	Folder 5
June	Folder 6
July	Box 2 Folder 1
August	Folder 2
September	Folder 3
October	Folder 4
November	Folder 5
December	Folder 6

Index of Correspondents

Names in **bold** appear in the RLIN record.

- Baily, C. V.--2.5
- Barmaper, Lillie--1.2
- Binder, Maurice--2.5
- Carroll, Garnet H.--2.5
- Cave, Rita--1.1, 1.3
- Clopet, Carl--1.5
- Craig, Lane--2.5
- Dagnall, T. C.--1.2
- Dormer, Sheila--2.4
- Doyle, Adrian Conan--1.2
- Driscoll, Arthur--1.3
- Duff, G. S.--1.2
- **Dyer, Harold F.**--1.1-6, 2.1-6
- Fenn, R. W.--1.2
- Gianna, Marchetti--2.4
- Glass, Eric--1.6, 2.1
- Gordon, Ruth M.--2.3
- Hawtrey, Anthony--2.5
- Heinemann, William--2.4
- **Hogg, Cyril W.**--1.1-6, 2.1-6
- Hurst, A.--1.1, 2.6
- Keene, P.--1.6
- Layton, E. M.--1.2-3
- Leverton, Garrett H., 1896-1949--1.3, 1.5, 2.2-4
- Ling, Joan--1.1-3
- Lloyd, Edward--1.1-2, 2.6
- MacQuarrie, Hector--2.1
- Mason, Haddon--1.5
- Neilson-Terry, Phyllis, 1892-1977--1.5
- Nugent, Elliott, 1899--1.5
- O'Leary, C. T.--1.2-3, 2.4-5
- Olmstead, Remington--1.3
- Rumsey, John W.--1.2-3
- Smith, C. F.--1.5
- Smith, Reginald--2.4
- **Stephens, J. Frank**--1.1-6, 2.1-6
- Streuli, Peter--2.1
- Treeby, Alroy--1.1, 1.6, 2.1, 2.3
- **Van Nostrand, M. Abbott**--1.1-6, 2.1-6
- Walford, R. G.--1.6, 2.5
- Waller, Jack, 1885-1957--1.2
- Walsh, Jack--2.5
- Warren, Sam B.--1.5
- Watt, A. P.--2.4
- Willner, George--2.4
- Witts, J. H.--2.1, 2.5
- Wootton, Kathleen--1.2, 1.4

