

Yale University Library  
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

# Guide to the Theresa Helburn Papers

YCAL MSS 864



by Beinecke Staff

July 2007

P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** YCAL MSS 864

**CREATOR:** Helburn, Theresa, 1887-1959

**TITLE:** Theresa Helburn papers

**DATES:** 1887-1992

**BULK DATES:** 1920-1958

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 8.5 linear feet (13 boxes) + 1 broadside.

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The Theresa Helburn Papers consist of correspondence, diaries, financial documents, writings, photographs, scrapbooks and memorabilia documenting her career as a writer and theatrical director and administrator for the Theatre Guild and other theaters.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.helburn>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.helburn>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Margaret (Mrs. Eric) Kocher and other Kocher family members, 1966-2010.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

## Conditions Governing Use

The Theresa Helburn Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

Theresa Helburn Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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## Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

The collection is comprised of material formerly classed as Uncat ZA Helburn, Uncat ZA File Helburn, Uncat MSS 959, and Uncat MSS 1245. Additional Helburn papers were identified in the Theatre Guild Archive (YCAL MSS 436) during the processing of those papers. These materials have not been merged and organized as a whole, but are described separately in the contents list below, according to the source of acquisition.

Information included in the Description of Papers note and Collection Contents section is drawn from information supplied with the collection and from an initial survey of the contents. Folder titles appearing in the contents list below are often based on those provided by the creator or previous custodian. Titles have not been verified against the contents of the folders in all cases. Otherwise, folder titles are supplied by staff during basic processing.

This finding aid may be updated periodically to account for new acquisitions to the collection and/or revisions in arrangement and description.

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## Associated Materials

Associated material: Theatre Guild Archive (YCAL MSS 436). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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## Theresa Helburn (1887-1959)

Theresa Helburn was born in New York City in 1887, graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1908, and had an early career as a writer of essays, poetry, and plays, and as a theatre critic for the *The Nation*. In 1919, she joined the Theatre Guild in New York City as a play reader. Within a few years she was co-administrative director with Lawrence Langner. As a writer, critic, director, and administrator, Theresa Helburn was a major force in the development of twentieth-century American theatre. She was married to the writer and teacher John Baker Opdycke (Oliver to his friends) from 1921 until his death in 1958. Helburn died in 1959.

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## Scope and Contents

The Theresa Helburn Papers consist of correspondence, diaries, financial documents, writings, photographs, scrapbooks and memorabilia documenting her career as a writer and theatrical director and administrator for the Theatre Guild and other theatres.

The correspondence in the collection is predominately personal, and includes letters from Carlotta O'Neill describing her husband's illness, a typed copy of an exchange between Helburn and George Bernard Shaw regarding her work in the film industry, and a letter from Shaw's assistant, Blanche Patch, describing the playwright's death. Helburn's diaries and date books include short entries about her meetings, travel, and social events, and often contain references to her health and the weather. Financial documents provide information regarding not only her daily personal expenses, but her own financial investment in Theatre Guild productions as well as in stocks and oil. Helburn's writing career is documented by early notes and story ideas, drafts and published versions of articles and presentations, poetry, and autobiographical essays, including those published in *The Nation*. Her work in, and opinions about, the film industry are described in drafts of articles and in the film story ideas, synopses, and comments that Helburn either wrote or reviewed while working in Hollywood at Columbia Pictures in mid-1930s.

While there is one file of material relating to Helburn's autobiography (which was completed and published after her death), the most substantial biographical information regarding her professional life is found in the scrapbooks that Helburn maintained from 1919 to 1950. Newspaper and magazine clippings of articles by and about Helburn, performance programs from the plays she wrote and/or directed, along with other miscellaneous ephemera, illuminate her many activities in the world of literature, theatre, and film. The papers also include photographs of family members, friends and colleagues, as well as candid and portrait photographs of Helburn. Material post-dating Helburn's death, including condolence letters, obituaries, and records pertaining to her estate, was added by family members.

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## Arrangement

The Papers are organized in three groupings: I. Pre-2010 Acquisitions, 1903-1958 . II. Material Formerly Part of the Theatre Guild Archive, 1918-1958. III. 2010 Acquisitions, 1887-1992.

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## Collection Contents

### 1: Pre-2010 Accessions, 1903-1958

4.33 linear feet (6 boxes)

Former call numbers: Uncat ZA Helburn, Uncat ZA File Helburn, Uncat ZA MS 196, Uncat ZA MS 404, Uncat MSS 959.

Personal Files 1922-1960

The Personal Files are organized into four subcategories: Correspondence, Diaries, Financial Records, and Photographs

#### Correspondence

b.1	"A" - "W" and unidentified	1938-58, undated
b.1	Bryn Mawr College	1948
b.1	Denenholz, Reginald	1952-53
b.1	O'Neill, Carlotta Monterey	1948-53, undated
b.1	Shaw, George Bernard	1935, 1950
b.1	Woollcott, Alexander	1937
b.1	Christmas cards	1953, undated
b.1	Postcards	1953-58, undated
b.1	Third Party	1922-1960
b.1	Notes and invitations containing directions to friends' homes, H-S, unidentified	undated
b.1	Diaries 12 Folders	[1910], 1928-1954

#### Financial records

##### Check registers

b.1	Bankers Trust Company 5 Folders	1937-1946
b.1	Chase National Bank	1943-1947
b.2	Chemical Bank and Trust	1944-1946
b.2	Fifth Avenue Bank of New York 4 Folders	1940-1951
b.2	Unidentified bank	1946-1947
b.2	Statements and deposit slips from various banks	1950-1951

## Personal Files &gt; Financial records (continued)

Investment records		
b. 2	A. W. Smith & Co.	1945-1950
b. 2	Oil lease	1949
b. 2	Stock records	1938-1950
b. 2	Texmass Petroleum Company	1950
b. 2	Photograph of Helburn and tintype of unidentified boy	undated
	Writings	1903-1956
	The Writings are arranged alphabetically within three subcategories: Articles, Poetry, and Presentations; Film Story Ideas, Treatments, Synopses, and Comments; and Notes	
Articles, poetry, and presentations		
b. 2	Autobiographical essays, drafts, typescript and holograph, corrected	1935, undated
b. 2	"The Aviator," a poem published in <i>The Bellman</i> , Volume XX, number 500	1916 Feb 12
b. 2	"Critics for Sunday Only," draft, typescript, corrected	undated
b. 2	"Drama," columns from <i>The Nation</i> 2 Folders	1919 January 4 - May 24
b. 2	"Exerpts from Remarks Delivered at the Dinner of the Yale Drama Alumni, Yale Club, June 4, 1944" draft typescript, corrected	1944
b. 2	"From One Guild to Another," published version in <i>Opera News</i>	1941 February 24
b. 2	"Mother," published version of poem clipped by the Romeike press clipping bureau from numerous U.S. newspapers	1932 May 7, 8
b. 2	"On Experiment," draft, typescript carbon, 1946 Jul 29 and published version from the <i>The New York Times</i> 1946 Aug 4	1946
b. 2	"O'Neill: an Impression," published version published in <i>The Saturday Review of Literature</i>	1936 November 21
b. 2	"Some Random Musings on Bright College Years," draft, typescript, corrected	undated
b. 2	["The Theatre, Bloody but Unbowed,"] drafts, typescript and carbon, corrected (published in the <i>North American Review Summer 1937</i> )	1937
b. 2	"Theatre Versus Pictures," draft, typescript, and published version from the <i>Journal of the American Association of University Women</i> 1936 January; accompanied by notes and typescript drafts of essays comparing theatre and film	1936
b. 2	"To You," printed version of poem published in <i>The Poetry Journal</i>	1917 March
b. 2	"What's in a Title?," printed version, published in <i>Leblang's Theatre Bulletin</i>	1948 April

## Writings (continued)

Film story ideas, treatments, synopses, and comments

Consist of drafts, typescript, some corrected and/or annotated.

b. 2	" <i>The Ambassadors</i> by Henry James"	undated
b. 2	"'Annette and Sylvie,' Volume I of <i>The Soul Enchanted</i> by Romain Rolland"	1935 March 22
b. 2	" <i>Chartreuse de Parme</i> [by] Stendahl"	1935 April 5
b. 2	"The Crystal Goblet"	1935 April 5
b. 2	"The Disappearance of Delight"	undated
b. 2	"Fair Ellen" 2 Folders	1935
b. 2	" <i>The Golden Bowl</i> by Henry James"	undated
b. 2	" <i>The Gypsy Queen of Paris</i> by R. McNair Wilson"	undated
b. 2	"The Insane Root"	undated
b. 2	"The Lesser Evil"	undated
b. 2	"Machinale"	undated
b. 2	"'Maid of Honor,' new treatment by Zoe Akins"	1935 June 29
b. 2	"The Naked Man"	undated
b. 2	Transcript of text of letter from S. K. Lauren to Harry Cohn regarding censorship issues in adapting <i>One Night in June</i> by Somerset Maugham for the screen	undated
b. 2	" <i>The Pleasure of Honesty</i> by Luigi Pirandello"	undated
b. 2	"The Pomeroy Baby," draft, typescript carbon, accompanied by "The Biltmore Baby"	undated
b. 2	" <i>The Red and the Black</i> [by] Stendahl"	1935 April 4
b. 2	"Rich Girl, Poor Girl"	undated
b. 2	"Roger Gordon"	undated
b. 2	Untitled story ideas	1935 March
b. 2	Untitled treatment	undated
b. 2	Notes 4 Folders  Includes holograph notes and quotations; notes for plays and story ideas; and outlines for courses on plays and modern poetry, accompanied by an annotated 1916 program of lectures at The Manor Club	1903, 1916, 1956, undated



Scrapbooks and Memorabilia 1903-1958  
Scrapbooks are arranged chronologically; Memorabilia is arranged alphabetically by subject.

#### Scrapbooks

b. 3	1911-1923	1911-1923
b. 3	1920-1929	1920-1929
b. 3	1929-1931	1929-1931
b. 3	1932-1934	1932-1934
b. 3	1935-1937	1935-1937
b. 4	1934-1941	1934-1941
b. 4	1942-1948 <a href="#">Scrapbooks, 1942-1948</a>	1942-1948
	1949-1950 Stored in: Oversize, Box 5	1949-1950
b. 4	1951-1952	1951-1952
	"New York Reviews of the <i>Importance of Being Earnest</i> for Theresa Helburn" Stored in: Oversize, Box 5	1947
	Theatre Guild twenty-fifth anniversary scrapbook Stored in: Oversize, Box 5	1944

#### Memorabilia

##### American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA)

b. 4	Program for "ANTA Album" production at the Ziegfeld Theatre	1951 May 6
b. 4	<i>Chapter One</i> , two issues of the newsletter of the Greater New York Chapter of ANTA	1957, April, May
b. 4	American Shakespeare Festival programs	1957, 1958
	Bryn Mawr	
	Diploma Stored in: Oversize, Box 6	1908
b. 4	"The Blue Heron," 50th reunion booklet	1958
b. 4	<i>Kidnapped</i> performance program	undated
b. 4	Opdycke, John Baker: miscellaneous notes, clippings, and ephemera Also stored in: Oversize, Box 6	1910-1956

##### Theatre Guild

## Scrapbooks and Memorabilia &gt; Memorabilia &gt; Theatre Guild (continued)

b. 4	Financial documents from productions of <i>Bonds of Interest</i> and <i>He Who Gets Slapped</i>	1919, 1946
b. 4	<i>The History of the Theatre Guild, 1919-1934</i>	1934
b. 4	<i>The History of the Theatre Guild, 1919-1937</i>	1937
b. 4	<i>The Story of the Theatre Guild, 1919-1947</i> ; with typescript notes laid in	1947
b. 4	<i>Theatre Guild Bulletin</i> [an occasional newsletter]	1946, undated
b. 4	"The Theater [sic] Guild," <i>Congressional Record</i> reprint	1946
b. 4	Souvenir program for <i>Mary of Scotland</i>	[1933]
b. 4	Program for "The Theatre Guild on the Air" production of <i>Ned McCobb's Daughter</i> , produced by United States Steel on WJZ and 9 stations of the American Broadcasting Company	1945 December 9
b. 4	Page from program for <i>Arms and the Girl</i>	[1950]
b. 4	" <i>Oklahoma!</i> the first ten years, a round-up improvised by Warren Caro and Reginald Denenholz...at the Tenth Birthday Party," mimeograph songbook	1953 Mar 31
b. 4	Actors' Fund of America salute to the Theatre Guild's Fortieth Season, program/menu	1958 May 11
b. 4	" <i>Oklahoma!</i> ," color photographic essay published in <i>Coronet</i> magazine	1944 June
b. 4	"Broadway Loves Their Brand of Lunacy," published in <i>Magazine Digest</i>	1945 April
b. 4	Miscellaneous newspaper clippings <i>2 Folders</i>	1925-1958
b. 4	Westport Country Playhouse programs Productions include <i>What About Maisie?</i> , <i>The Saturday Night Kid</i> , <i>With Respect to Joey</i> , <i>Janus</i> , <i>Fever for Life</i> , <i>Showtime</i> , <i>Back to Methuselah</i> , and <i>The Minotaur</i>	1953, 1957 July 22–September 2
b. 4	Miscellaneous clippings <i>2 Folders</i> Also stored in: Oversize, Box 5	1920-1950
	Miscellaneous publications	
b. 4	"Danger Ahead: Asia," by William Randolph Hearst, Jr., reprint from the <i>New York Journal American</i>	[1956]
b. 4	"Le Dédale" by Paul Hervieu, published as a supplement to <i>L'Illustration</i>	1903 December 26
b. 4	<i>That Freedom May Not Perish...</i> , pamphlet published by The International Rescue Committee's Program in Support of the Hungarian Freedom Fighters	[1957?]

## Scrapbooks and Memorabilia &gt; Memorabilia &gt; Miscellaneous publications (continued)

b. 4	Mid-winter book supplement of <i>The Nation</i>	1921 February 9
b. 4	<i>The North American Review</i> issue, Vol. 243, number 1	1937 Spring
b. 4	<i>Snappy Stories</i> issue, Vol. X, number 1	1921 July 25
b. 4	<i>Stage Pictorial</i> issue, Vol. 3, number 5	1946 July
b. 4	<i>Toward Arab-Israeli Conciliation: Memorandum on the Eastern Mediterranean</i> , pamphlet published by the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs	1958
b. 4	Vedanta Society brochures: <i>What is Vedanta?</i> and <i>Why a Hindu is a Vegetarian</i>	1900, undated
b. 4	Miscellaneous ephemera Also stored in: Oversize, Box 6	1929-1947, undated
Oversize		
b. 5 (Oversize)	Scrapbooks	
b. 6 (Oversize)	Helburn's Bryn Mawr diploma	1908
b. 6 (Oversize)	Opdycke ephemera	

## 2: Materials Formerly Part of the Theatre Guild Archive, 1918-1957

1 linear foot (1 box)

Former call number: ZA Theatre Guild.

Correspondence		
b. 7	Craig, Edward Gordon	1918-1919
b. 7	Correspondence regarding Helburn plays <i>3 Folders</i> Includes correspondence, production materials and press clippings relating to <i>Crysalis</i>	1927-1956
b. 7	Invitations to miscellaneous events	1931-1954
Writings		
Plays		
b. 7	"A Hero is Born" <i>2 Folders</i>	1937
b. 7	"Other Lives"	undated
b. 7	Articles <i>4 Folders</i> Includes writings by Helburn published in Bryn Mawr College literary magazines, and articles on Philip Moeller, and articles published in <i>The New Republic</i> .	
b. 7	Talks and presentations <i>2 Folders</i>	1944-1953
b. 7	Interview transcripts and scripts	1940, 1952, undated
b. 7	Autobiographical sketches	undated
b. 7	Miscellaneous notes	undated
b. 7	Photographs of Helburn as Queen Elizabeth	1944
Printed material		
b. 7	<i>Call Bureau Classification</i> , "property of Columbia Pictures Corporation"	[1934?]
b. 7	<i>Theatre Incorporated Has the Honor to Present The Old Vic Theatre Company...</i> , by Edward Choate and John F. Matthews	1946
b. 7	Miscellaneous pamphlets and brochures	1949-1957, undated

**3: 2010 Acquisitions, 1887-1992**

3.17 linear feet (5 boxes)

Former call number: Uncat MSS 1245.

Correspondence		
b. 8	General 13 Folders	1902-1958
b. 8	Martin, Mary and Richard Halliday	1948
b. 8	Munson, Ona	1950-1955
b. 8	Shaw, Bernard Consists of typed transcriptions of letters to Helburn from Shaw.	1920-1935
b. 8	Yale University Library	1957-1962
b. 8	Correspondence regarding Theresa Helburn's death and estate 5 Folders Includes letters of condolence, correspondence with attorney's and financial advisors and family members.	1959-1987
b. 8	Photographs 7 Folders Also stored in: Oversize, Boxes 11, 12 and 13. Includes family photographs, portraits photographs of Helburn and John Opdycke, and friends and colleagues.	1887-1943, undated
b. 8	Handwriting analysis	1917
Writings		
b. 8	Poetry	undated
b. 8	Talks and lectures	circa 1950s
b. 8	Notes for autobiographical sketches	undated
b. 8	Clippings Includes clippings of the poem, "Mother" from a clipping service, and an issue of North American Review containing an article by Helburn.	1932, 1937
b. 9	Yearly appointment books and diaries 15 Folders	1910-1958, undated
b. 9	European trip diary	1926 July- August
b. 9	Small scrapbook of poems by various authors clipped from newspapers	undated
Theatre Guild records		
b. 10	Memoranda	1955
b. 10	<i>Oklahoma!</i>	1943-1953, undated

## Theatre Guild records (continued)

b. 10	Miscellaneous papers	1955-1956, undated
b. 10	Appraisals of Theatre Guild records	1955
	Honorary degrees	
b. 10	Columbia University	1954
b. 10	Franklin and Marshall College <i>2 Folders</i> Includes degrees of Theresa Helburn and John Opdycke.	1952
b. 10	Obituary notices <i>2 Folders</i> Includes press clippings and other obituaries for Theresa Helburn and John Opdycke.	1956, 1959
b. 10	Printed material <i>3 Folders</i> Includes a small volume of the <i>New Testament and Settings and Costumes of the Modern Stage</i> by Theodore Komisarjevsky and Lee Simonson inscribed to Helburn from Simonson.	
b. 10	Embroidered cat, "Diamond"	undated
	Oversize	
b. 11	Photographs <i>5 Folders</i>	undated
b. 11	Small drawings <i>2 Folders</i>	1965, undated
b. 12	Honorary degrees and awards <i>2 Folders</i>	1945-1992
b. 12	Photographs <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 12	Printed reproductions of film posters <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 12	Drawings <i>5 Folders</i> Includes a color set design drawing for <i>Oklahoma!</i> , and a charcoal drawing of Theresa Helburn.	undated
b. 13	Photographs of Theresa Helburn <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 13	Caricature of Theresa Helburn	1953
b. 14 (Broadside)	Charcoal portrait of Theresa Helburn	1940

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Authors, American -- 20th Century -- Archives  
Theater -- United States  
Theatrical producers and directors -- United States

### **Genres / Formats**

Photographs

### **Occupations**

Authors -- United States -- 20th Century  
Theatrical producers and directors -- United States -- 20th Century

### **Names**

Helburn, Theresa, 1887-1959  
Opdycke, John B. (John Baker), 1878-1956

### **Corporate Body**

Theatre Guild