

Walther R. Volbach Papers

1897-1996

2 boxes (1 linear ft.)

Call no.: FS 087

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Born in Mainz, Germany on December 24, 1897, the theatre historian and stage director Walther R. Volbach began directing operas and plays at the age of 17. After his immigration to the United States in 1936, he worked for several colleges, coming to the University of Massachusetts Amherst for five years as a visiting professor following his retirement in 1965. Noted as a director of operas and plays and for his set design, Volbach was author of three books: *The Problems of Opera Production* (1953), *Adolphe Appia : The Prophet of The Modern Theatre* (1968), and *Memoirs of Max Reinhardt's Theaters* (1972).

The Volbach collection includes personal and professional correspondence in English and German, mostly from Volbach's later years, regarding family, publishing, lectures, and employment. The collection also includes photographs of set designs, an image of Volbach teaching a class, publications, and lecture and research notes on theatre history.

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Background on Walther R. Volbach

The theatre historian and stage director Walther R. Volbach began a distinguished career in the performing arts at a remarkably early age. Born in Mainz, Germany on December 24, 1897, he conducted his first opera at the age of 17, and within a few years had built a resume that included work as

assistant to Max Reinhardt, the great Austrian director and innovative set designer, and as theatre and opera critic for the *Berliner Morgenpost*.



A 1918 graduate of Tuebingen, Volbach earned a doctorate at the University of Muenster in 1920 and embarked on an academic career that resulted in over 100 scholarly articles and three books: *The Problems of Opera Production* (1953), *Adolphe Appia : The Prophet of The Modern Theatre* (1968), and *Memoirs of Max Reinhardt's Theaters* (1972). Leaving Germany for the United States in 1936, he continued his career on faculty at several universities, including Marquette and Texas Christian University, and after his retirement in 1965, as visiting professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst.

In the United States, Volbach continued to add to his reputation as a director and producer of operas, and for his scenic design, but he also became noted as a translator of modern European drama into English. He died in Amherst on August 5, 1996.

Scope of collection

A small, but interesting glimpse into the career of a stage director and scenic designer, the papers of Walther R. Volbach includes scattered documents relating to his birth and education, a few publications, research notes on Adolphe Appia and theatre history, photographs of set designs for a play directed by Volbach, and some correspondence with colleagues and students, family and friends. Although the majority of items in the collection are in English, some of the correspondence is in German.

Approximately half of the collection relates to Volbach's research and writing on Appia, including a draft of Volbach's book, reviews, correspondence (1973-1989) relating to his research and publication, and essays written by Appia. The remainder of the collection includes a video on the history of the Southwest Theatre Conference (SWTC) and publications by Volbach from *Players Magazine*, *The American-German Review*, *Dramatics*, and The National Theatre Conference.

Collection inventory

Biography	1897-1996	Box 1: 1
Correspondence	1926, 1937	Box 1: 2
Correspondence	1960-1970	Box 1: 3
Correspondence	1980-1990	Box 1: 4
Lecture Notes On Acting	1939	Box 1: 5
Lecture Notes On Art, Drama, and Theatre	1939, 1966	Box 1: 6
Lecture Notes On Stanislavsky and Reinhardt	Undated	Box 1: 7
Lecture Notes On Theatre History	1971-1972	Box 1: 8
Newsclippings	Undated	Box 1: 9
Offprints	1968-1977	Box 1: 10
Photos (including set design)	1924-1959	Box 1: 10
Playbills	Undated	Box 1: 12
Set Design	Undated	Box 1: 13
Volbach and Appia: An Admiring Glance at an Admirer	Undated	Box 1: 14
Writing-: Published	1948-1949	Box 1: 15
Writing: Published	1951-1968	Box 1: 16
Writing: Drafts	Undated	Box 1: 17
Adolphe Appia	Undated	Box 2: 1
Adolphe Appia (Correspondance)	1973-1989	Box 2: 2
Adolphe Appia (Original Part 1)	Undated	Box 2: 3
Adolphe Appia (Original Part 2)	Undated	Box 2: 4
Adolphe Appia (Ring Binder)	Undated	Box 2: 5

Administrative information

Access

Languages:

The collection is open for research.

English, German

Provenance

Gift of Fritz B. Volbach, August 1996.

Processing Information

Processed by Olabode Tunde-Lukan, October 2008.

Copyright and Use (More information)

Cite as: Walther R. Volbach Papers (FS 087). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Drama--Study and teaching.
- Set designers.

Names

- Appia, Adolphe, 1862-1928.
- University of Massachusetts Amherst. Department of Theater.

- University of Massachusetts Amherst-- Faculty.
- Volbach, Walther R. (Walther Richard), 1897- .

Genre terms

- Photographs.

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