

GALA Script—TLA 10/12/12

KEVIN WINKLER to introduce: In honor of our Anniversary Gala, TLA’s very own Round Table Players will re-enact our founding in 1937 with a script derived from the recorded transcript of that illustrious meeting. The meeting was planned a full year in advance by George Freedley, Librarian in charge of the Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library, who suggested to his boss, H.M. Lydenberg, that theatre librarians, curators, heads of drama departments, and stage historians be invited to attend an informal discussion on the “Care and Preservation of Theatre Material.” The discussion was to be held at the library the following year during the annual meeting of the American Library Association. The invitation reached across the country to locations as far away as Hawaii. Over 55 people gathered on that now historic occasion—June 23, 1937—for what was called the Theatre Library Round Table. It was out of this meeting that the Theatre Library Association was established.

The Round Table focused on a range of topics related to the care, preservation, and access of theatre collections; many of these topics are still top priorities for libraries, archives, and museums today. Their readers were students, faculty, scholars and importantly, the theatre community of artists, designers, writers and directors. The Round Table participants recognized the importance of the role of libraries and collections to the artistic community.

The Round Table Players will impersonate some of the key participants at the meeting. Host George Freedley—who would go on to become TLA’s first president—will be played by our current president, Kenneth Schlesinger. The

rest of our cast of characters will be brought to life by Nancy Friedland, Marti LoMonaco, and David Nochimson.

The scene is set in the ornate Trustees Room of the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. Dr. H.M. Lydenberg, Director of the New York Public Library, opens the meeting, and introduces Mr. Freedley.

DAVID: Friends, you are welcome! I am going to show how heartily the Library wants to extend that welcome by refraining from saying the obvious and talking to you about how welcome you are, how glad we are to have you here and how strongly we feel that such an occasion as this does offer much promise, much hope. The thing to do is to stop talking about that and get down to business. We have a full program, full of thought, questions, challenge; and I am sure that Mr. Freedley will be glad to start now and begin the journey full of promise and certain of success.

KENNETH: Ladies and gentlemen of the Theatre Librarians Roundtable: I shall say as little as I can myself because the whole point in the meeting was to get you all here and let you do the talking. It is my plan to propound the suggested questions, and then ask one of you to comment as to just what you think of it. The first question that comes up this morning for discussion is the exchange of duplicate material. I am going to ask Professor Ball of Princeton what he thinks should be done.

MARTI: It comes as somewhat of a surprise to me, and I am in the worst position to speak on the subject because I do not yet know the extent of the

duplicate material in the theatre collection at Princeton. It seems to me a problem which is essential to discuss is how inexpensively so to list that material as to be able to send out these records to other theatre collections for consideration.

NANCY: Lillian A. Hall, Harvard: I feel that my chief difficulty at Harvard would be to make a list of duplicate material because we have so much of it there. It has always seemed to us it would be easier if the libraries who need something would write for what they need. I could much more easily check what they need than list all our duplicates. We would like to have these where they would do the most good, irrespective of their value.

I wish that somebody might have something to say about exchanging duplicate clippings. I find so many do not do that. If you all felt that a list of the duplicate material should be made, I would be glad to see what we can do at Harvard, although we are very short-handed.

KENNETH: The second point for discussion is the compilation of published and unpublished indices and bibliographies or a card system which might be exchanged. Mr. Rush, what do you think of such a project?

DAVID: Charles E. Rush, Yale: We are going to be reproducing cards shortly, now that we have new processes, microphotographic and the like, and it will not be long before we can exchange reproductions more cheaply and easily. I have a daughter at Bennington. They have not started a theatre collection there yet of much size. She came to Yale this winter and worked

on *Hamlet*, and laid out several hundred designs and costumes. We filmed them for her and sent them to her, so all winter she has been working on film reproductions of those hundreds of pictures, and I think it cost her 67 cents or something like that.

MARTI: Robert Ball: I have had occasion this year to have manuscripts reproduced by microphotography, which was much cheaper than photostating or retyping would have been. It seems to me such bibliographical lists could be typed up first and then microphotographed, and sent around more cheaply than in any other way and be preserved much better.

KENNETH: I would like then to pass on to point No. 4, to speak of cataloging and shortcuts in cataloging. Mrs. Hall, you have had much experience in the cataloging and the arranging of theatre material?

NANCY: We do not catalog our programs. The card catalog would be filled up with cards if we did that. The playbills are just put in the stack and arranged geographically, and there is a general card in the main catalog saying playbills and photographs can be consulted in the theatre collection. The only cataloging that is done of the prints is my catalog which has been published, most of it – the photographs are not cataloged.

DAVID: Charles Rush: The most helpful thing I can think to do is to go and see what Mr. Freedley is doing in his department here. It is a thrilling thing, I

think. We just stand in awe of it in our place. I wonder where he gets the money to do it with.

KENNETH: The next point is the question of the encouragement of local depositories. Miss Chokla, you are collecting Texas material there, I believe.

MARTI: Sarah Chokla, McCord Museum: Yes, we are. That is how the thing started. However, we accept anything we can get whether it relates to the Southwest or not. We arrange contests in connection with our collection to draw interest, as well as material from all the Southwestern states.

DAVID: At Yale, we are training collectors, a couple of scholarship boys, who spend so many hours a week to collect loose material of all kinds around the university, and particularly the kind of material we are talking about today. They are kept busy. After two or three years in that work, they are so interested that they become adult collectors very shortly.

KENNETH: Mr. Wyman, you told me you are making beginnings in establishing a theatre collection at the University of Hawaii. I suppose you are collecting programs for the Honolulu stage, as well as for your own university's productions?

NANCY: Yes, we are. I got interested through seeing the collection at Tokyo, in the museum which is a replica of the Fortune theatre. Dr. Tsubouchi was the man who translated the entire work of Shakespeare into Japanese for their

stage, and made quite a collection of Japanese things. That started me off, and I collected a few Japanese items there for our collection.

KENNETH: Miss Seymour, have you any problems at the Museum of the City of New York you think are pertinent to our discussion?

MARTI: I don't think so. We are rather embarrassed, as many are, by lack of funds, so we have to depend entirely on gift material, and we have become so rich with that, that now we need space, and we are a little embarrassed with our desire to collect all we can and our knowledge that we are overflowing. But people are very generous in finding New York material and offering it to us, and then we try to turn over what we don't want to other museums and librarians that can use it.

KENNETH: It seems to me it is a wise thing wherever we can to encourage the community to establish its own depositories. First, we should encourage the community to do it for itself.

The next point is the securing of unpublished manuscripts, and as Mr. Barrett Clark has been doing more about that than anyone else at the present time, I will ask him if he will start the ball rolling.

DAVID: A year ago I went to the largest play agent and told him that one offshoot of the scheme was the encouragement of people like himself and other agents to turn over their play manuscripts specifically, and programmes and letters to those libraries that are equipped or interested. The mere fact

that Mr. Freedley is in charge of this theatre collection has made it possible for me in passing to say, “Why don’t you send this material you are about to throw away to the library?”

The sum and substance of my own practical experience in this field is this: That a great many people, not understanding the value to us, to students of material of this kind, have a notion that I or any private collector is trying to put something over, or that I am a scout for the picture people. Some of these people have been extremely friendly and generous, but for the most part they suspect any individual.

If there was a board that had a letterhead, and on that letterhead were the names of certain responsible librarians and university people, it seems to me that whenever any of us who are interested in collecting this material came across worthwhile material, we could suggest that the collection be given here or here or here.

My own feeling is this: I would like to suggest that instead of forming another board or association, this one would be under the American Library Association, or somehow a part of some existing association, rather than to start another.

May I ask for a point of information? Would it be in accordance with the bylaws of the ALA to form such a subsidiary organization as this which would cut across existing sub-divisions and groupings of the ALA, plus – as I mentioned sometime ago – private collectors, outsiders, possibly as associates?

KENNETH: It would probably be perfectly possible, if it becomes the Theatre Library Association, to join the ALA in the same way as the Music Library Association did.

DAVID: Charles Rush: We should see that something should be done about it. I want to see action.

MARTI: Oliver Sayler, New York: In line with this suggestion of action, and as a representative of the profession of publicity, I would say that whatever is done here, I would suggest that all of you, when you go back home, get in touch with your best newspaper, or more than one paper, and let it be known, broadcast across this continent that this material which Mr. Clark has told you about disappearing is wanted by somebody, and for God's sake, keep it; hold on to it!

NANCY: Philip Hofer, Pierpont Morgan Library: I feel you have to get a comprehensive name for your organization. Perhaps a committee should be appointed to draft a title. I think we ought to get down to action on matters of this sort, and hope action can be brought about.

I move we organize an association to be known temporarily, at least, as the Theatre Library Association, the permanent name to be adopted later.

MARTI: C. Seymour Thompson, University of Pennsylvania: I second the motion.

KENNETH: What is the feeling of the now organized Theatre Library Association?

MARTI: Oliver Sayler: May I suggest that a committee of five be empowered to appoint sub-committees for various problems?

NANCY: Philip Hofer: I move that Mr. Freedley, Mr. Clark and Professor Ball start this committee and be empowered to add thereto as many more members as they think necessary for the efficient operations of this committee, with the idea in mind that there might be a quorum present, and give them the power to expand the committee as well as to form sub-committees.

MARTI: Florence Overton, New York Public Library: I second that motion.

KENNETH: Would anyone like to discuss the motion before it is voted on?
(PAUSE) The motion is carried.

DAVID: Douglas L. Hunt, Birmingham-Southern College: One of the things which impresses me this morning tremendously is the need for us who live out from New York, away from these collections, to know of the places where we can get them. It seems to me this new organization might, as one of its services to such a person as myself, for instance, send out a mimeographed sheet telling of all of these things and giving the exact place where we can get

them. I should like sometime to have just what Miss Gilder said written down on paper and put it in my files.

MARTI: Rosamund Gilder, *Theatre Arts*: The Artists clearing house project hopes to come into existence to answer exactly that kind of question over the whole field of the four arts. That is to say, you want to know where very good films are and don't know exactly what the address of the Modern Film Library is. This organization hopes to be able to answer such questions instantly. If you want to know where the music collections are or material on what non-profit organizations are handling concert material, this clearing house will bring together all these non-profit organizations that have not the money to put into publicity but have the material you want. It will bring these lines together for the service of the country as a whole.

KENNETH: Mr. Mulholland said to me yesterday that he wondered whether it would be possible to have a board of advisement on library purchases, that many librarians in general libraries, not having any special knowledge of the theatre, purchased books which were not necessarily the best books, or books which duplicated each other because the person making the selection was not familiar with the books themselves. Would you develop that theme, Mr. Mulholland?

NANCY: John Mulholland, *The Sphinx*: I think you have covered it. The idea I had was that in an organization – people who really know the subject could be of much help to smaller institutions where the librarian did not know

this particular subject. If specialists of this organization could get out lists for those on the fringe with small collections, you would be doing an enormous amount of good.

MARTI: Oliver Saylor: Really, up to now we have been discussing, I think, chiefly the acquisition and cataloging and making available to all types of people with interest in records of the theatre of the past.

Now, in order to make this a fifty-fifty proposition, it is only fair to ask the theatre to cooperate with you in building up the permanent collection for the sake of the future. I have been for many years on the firing line of the creation of the very material you are talking about. I am sometimes amazed at the amount of such things still in somebody's attic or here or there or wherever across the country, involving the theatre of times past. I am amazed until I begin to realize that there are others like myself who keep and put away things like that.

If requests come at the wrong time, the requests will be ignored. The wrong time is during the days of preparation. It is the business of theatre librarians in all producing centers to keep in touch with all press representatives, and particularly to ask to be informed of the closing of a production, whether it runs one night or five years, because the one time you can get this material is during the week ending Saturday night when the show goes to the warehouse.

There is no longer any use for the scrap book, or daily need for this material, which is the very thing you want as a record. It is yours for the

taking away. But Monday morning of the week after, it is on its way to the dump.

KENNETH: As the time is drawing to a close and many of you have other meetings to attend, I declare this first meeting of the Theatre Library Association at an end.