

Description and Finding Aid

**EARLE GREY PLAYERS COLLECTION
F2311**

Prepared by Sara Griffiths February 2013

EARLE GREY PLAYERS COLLECTION

Dates of creation

1949-1994, predominant 1949-[1955?]

Extent

3 cm of textual records

1 artefact

Administrative history

For two nights in June 1946, the Earle Grey Players staged a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* on the north terrace of the Trinity College quadrangle with the support of the Provost of Trinity College Dr. R.S.K. Seeley. The company of players was founded by Earle Grey and his wife Mary Godwin, British actors with a wealth of theatrical experience who moved to Canada in the early 1940s. They established the Earle Grey Players with the goal of cultivating an appreciation for Shakespeare in Canada and presenting Shakespeare's plays in a way closely aligned with the original spirit and intent of the playwright. The critical success of *Twelfth Night* led to productions in other locations and in the following summer of 1947, audience demand resulted in the presentation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for five nights at Trinity College. Also in 1947, plays were staged at Central High School of Commerce which initiated a series of school productions in support of the founders desire to bring the stimulation and excitement of Shakespearean drama to school audiences.

On June 27th, 1949, at Trinity College, the Earle Grey Players opened the first official Shakespeare Festival with a production of *As You Like It*. Revealing the significance of the event for the cultural life of Toronto, the festival was opened by the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and Mrs. Ray Lawson and had the backing of City Council and tourist associations as well as growing press coverage. With the broader goal of representing Shakespeare's time, free Elizabethan music concerts using period instruments were added to the festival programme as well as an exhibit in the Trinity College Entrance Hall of books and prints relating to Shakespeare. In support of the Shakespeare Festival, both the Royal Ontario Museum and the Toronto Art Gallery put on exhibits and displays of pottery, furniture, costumes, photographs and prints relevant to Shakespearean times.

In 1950 four comedies were produced at the Festival and the Earle Grey Players expanded their tour of Shakespearean productions to other locations and high schools. In 1951, the Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace (Stratford-Upon-Avon) presented a mulberry tree to the Festival which was planted in the Trinity quadrangle. By 1951 there was a growing wardrobe department under the direction of former Hart House Theatre Designer and Assistant Director Mabel Letchford who

developed an extensive Elizabethan wardrobe including articles donated by renowned English actors. As news of the Festival's existence had travelled to England, donations of theatrical suits of armour and other items began to arrive.

The first effort to present a Shakespearean tragedy was in 1952. *Julius Caesar* was presented to great acclaim. With audiences continuing to grow, the Earle Grey Players took Shakespeare's plays to more than 24 high schools. For the 1952 season the Festival displayed a rare First Folio of Shakespeare's plays printed in 1623, a donation from the Folger Library in Washington and the first instance of a First Folio on Canadian soil.

By 1953 and 1954, the Festival had expanded to five weeks of productions, a more permanent stage had been built, well known musicians were playing in the free Elizabethan music concerts, and the Earle Grey Players toured schools in locations as far away as the Maritimes. The school tours were arguably the most valuable contribution of the Earle Grey Players as they provided students with their first opportunity to see live performances of Shakespeare's plays. By 1956, the school tours function of the Earle Grey Players required the Players to undertake 10 weeks of travel through Ontario's smaller towns.

The Earle Grey Players Shakespeare Festival was produced annually until 1959, when renovations at Trinity College necessitated finding a new home for the festival. When nothing materialized, Mary Godwin and Earle Grey returned to England and continued acting until their respective deaths in 1971 and 1978.

Source: Administrative history taken from materials found in the History series file 1-7, Box 1 as follows: *The Shakespeare Festival: A Short History of the Initial Five Years of Canada's First Shakespeare Festival 1949-1954* published in 1954 by The Ryerson Press; "Canada's first Shakespearean festival lasted only 10 years" in *Early Canadian Life* August 1979; and "The Scottish Play" in *Salterrae* September 1994.

Scope and content

The Earle Grey Players Collection consists of programmes and brochures for the annual Shakespeare Festival held at Trinity College, historical information on the founding and development of the Shakespeare Festival, and ephemera related to the Festival, including a bronze plaque commemorating the location of a mulberry tree grown from a tree in Shakespeare's birthplace Stratford-on-Avon.

Contains series

1. Production flyers, programmes and brochures
2. History
3. Ephemera

Notes

Acquisition history: Collection created by archivist from various small accessions

Arrangement: Arranged by archivist into the above series

Restrictions on access: no restrictions

Terms governing use and reproduction / publication: public domain

Accruals: Further accruals are expected

Associated material: The Toronto Reference Library holds photographs of Earle Grey Players productions by photographer Eason Humphries

Related groups of records: Material related to Earle Grey is found in the Trinity College Dramatic Society Collection (F2126). Correspondence regarding a brass plaque honouring Earle Grey is found in files 2-1-5 and 2-1-6. Earle Grey is identified as Director for two Trinity College Dramatic Society productions, *Chicken Every Sunday* in December 1945 and *The Wild Duck* in November 1947, in files 3-1-20 and 3-2-2. Further records can be found in the records of Provost Seeley: F1002, Accession 1986-0011/004/04.

Provenance access points:

Grey, Earle 1890 -1978

Godwin, Mary [18--?]-1971

SERIES 1: PRODUCTION FLYERS, PROGRAMMES AND BROCHURES

Dates of creation: 1949-1954

Extent: 6 files of textual records (less than 3 cm)

Scope and content: This series consists of single page flyers, multiple-page stapled programme booklets and folded brochures for the Earle Grey Players Shakespeare Festival at Trinity College, arranged chronologically.

Location / File Listing:

FOLDER/UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
Programmes	1949	1949	1 flyer for Shakespeare Festival Toronto 27 th June – 16 th July in Trinity College Quadrangle for three plays-- <i>As You Like It</i> , <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , and <i>Twelfth Night</i> --including promotion of related exhibits and displays, 2 playbills listing players for <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and <i>Twelfth Night</i> , and programme booklet for July 10 th recital of Elizabethan music in Strachan Hall	1-1

Programmes	1950	1950	1 programme booklet and 1 folded brochure for Second Annual Open Air Toronto Shakespeare Festival June 19 to July 15 showing four plays: <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> , <i>The Tempest</i> , and <i>Twelfth Night</i> ; photocopy of part of folded brochure	1-2
Programmes	1951	1951	1 programme booklet and 1 folded brochure for Third Annual Open Air Toronto Shakespeare Festival July 2 to July 28 in Trinity College Quadrangle showing three plays: <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> , <i>The Tempest</i> , and <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	1-3
Programmes	1952	1952	1 folded brochure and 3 programme booklets for Fourth Annual Open Air Toronto Shakespeare Festival June 30 to July 26 in Trinity College Quadrangle showing three plays: <i>Julius Caesar</i> , <i>The Winter's Tale</i> , and <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> . One of the programme booklets is signed by many of the players, including Timothy Findlay	1-4
Programmes	1953	1953	1 programme booklet for Fifth Annual Open Air Toronto The Shakespeare Festival July 1 to August 1 in Trinity College Quadrangle showing three plays: <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , <i>The Winter's Tale</i> , and <i>As You Like It</i>	1-5
Programmes	1954	1954	1 programme booklet for Sixth Season of the Annual Open Air Toronto Shakespeare Festival July 5 to July 31 showing three plays: <i>Macbeth</i> , <i>As You Like It</i> , and <i>Twelfth Night</i>	1-6

SERIES 2: HISTORY

Dates of creation: 1954-1994

Extent: 2 files of textual records

Scope and content: This series consists of a small volume documenting the first five years of the Earle Grey Players productions and activities and 3 newspaper or journal articles documenting events in the history of the Earle Grey Players.

Location / File Listing:

FOLDER/UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
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History	1954	1994	<p>1 book titled <i>The Shakespeare Festival: A Short History of the Initial Five Years of Canada's First Shakespeare Festival 1949-1954</i> written by Alan Caillou with a prologue written by then Provost of Trinity College R.S.K. Seeley, reflections by Frank Chappell, and appreciations written by Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir Ralph Richardson</p> <p>Photocopy of undated news clipping titled "Earle Grey Postpones Festival" stating that the Shakespearean Festival will not be held that year (1959?)</p> <p>Newspaper article from <i>Early Canadian Life</i> August, 1979 titled "Canada's first Shakespearean festival lasted only 10 years" detailing the history of the Earle Grey Players and the Shakespearean Festival</p> <p>Photocopy of news article from <i>Salterrae</i> September 1994 titled "The Scottish Play" describing the history of the Shakespearean Festival and relationship to Trinity College</p> <p>Article from <i>Trinity</i> magazine Summer 2005 titled "All's Well That Starts Well" by Cynthia MacDonald</p>	1-7
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SERIES 3: EPHEMERA

Dates of creation: [1949?]-[195-?]

Extent: 4 ticket stubs, 1 postcard, and 1 brass plaque

Scope and content: This series consists of ticket stubs for the Shakespearean Festival and Elizabethan concert, one b&w postcard of a Shakespearean Festival production, and one brass plaque.

Location / File Listing:

FOLDER/UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
Ephemera	[1949?]	[195-?]	4 ticket stubs for Shakespearean Festival which entitle holder also to attend the Elizabethan concert held either in Strachan Hall (1 off-white stub) or Trinity Great Hall (3 green stubs-possibly date?)	1-8

1 b&w postcard, undated, showing outdoor stage production and audience. Text printed on the front of the postcard reads, "Earle Grey Players' Annual Shakespeare Festival, Trinity College, University of Toronto"

Brass
Plaque

1951

1951

Engraving on plaque reads: "This tree grown from Shakespeare's mulberry tree in Stratford-on-Avon, The gift of the Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace to Mr. and Mrs. Earle Grey in recognition of their Shakespeare Festival in Trinity College was presented by them to the college. It was planted by Sir Alexander Clutterbuck K.C.M.G, M.E. British High Commissioner 2nd July, 1951"

2

The plaque was hung on the tree which apparently died in 1958 or 1959. Subsequently the plaque was placed in the north terrace until at least 1994.