



BHC-MSS 0048
Guide to the Bridgeport Theatre Collection
By Meg Rinn, June 2019

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Bridgeport History Center

Title: Bridgeport Theatre Collection

Dates: 1873-1936 [Bulk 1910s-1920s]

Quantity: 2 manuscript boxes (.83 linear feet)

Abstract: Bridgeport has been the home of a number of theatres over the centuries. Being the backyard of theatre mogul Sylvester Z. Poli contributed heavily to that fact, as did the popularity of theatre in the late 19th and early 20th century, as well as Bridgeport's proximity to both New York City and New Haven. The Bridgeport Theatre Collection contains various programs, tickets, and photographs from the hey-day of many now-closed venues within the city.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Administrative History:

Bridgeport has been the home of a number of theatres over the centuries. Not only was it the backyard of theatre mogul Sylvester Z. Poli, but Bridgeport was located between the theatre towns of both New York City and New Haven - the latter being best known for the Shubert Theatre and premiering such works as "A Raisin in the Sun." Theatre was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Bridgeporters had an astounding selection of locations to choose from.

Two of the most important theatres in the city are the Palace (often called Poli's Palace) and the Majestic Theatres. Owned by Sylvester Z. Poli, the two theatres share a building and a city block, with the Savoy Hotel placed between them. The buildings themselves are in the beaux arts style, and were designed by Thomas Lamb. Opened in 1922, the theatres were originally for live programming - especially vaudeville. Major actors of the time period and upcoming stars performed in the complex, including Mae West in 1927. See collection MSS 0049, Photograph Collection of "Dad" the Poli's Theatre Doorman, for a photographic who's who that passed through the theatre doors.

In 1934, the complex was sold to Loew Theatres and began showing movies. The two theatres remained open until the 1970s, when they were closed. While 1975 did see both the Palace and the Majestic join the National Register of Historic Places and there have been numerous attempts to renovate the buildings over the years, the complex remains boarded up as of 2019. The book, *Poli's Palace and Majestic Theatres Memories Project* by Jay Miscencik and Geralene Valentine is essential companion reading for the aforementioned theatres, and contains extensive photographs of the theatres in their current state.

Additional theatres owned by Sylvester Z. Poli include the Plaza (1901), Poli's (1912), the Lyric (1918). Other smaller theatres also proliferated.

Scope and Content note

This artificial collection curated by the Bridgeport History Center over the years and with many donors primarily consists of theatre programs for various venues within Bridgeport, with the bulk of material focusing on the 1910s to 1920s. There are some tickets and handbills as well, but they are fewer and further between.

In addition, there are photographs of the theatres, mostly the Poli owned buildings such as the Palace and the Majestic, along with smaller venues such as the Lyric Theatre.

Arrangement note

Arranged alphabetically by name of theatres, with theatre programs, tickets, and ephemera making up series I and photographs making up series II. All material is arranged chronologically.

Administrative information

Provenance: Various donors and purchases.

Preferred Citation:

Bridgeport Theatre Collection (BHC-MSS 0048), Bridgeport History Center.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

Poli, Sylvester

Corporate names

Majestic Theatre (Bridgeport, Conn.)

Park Theatre (Bridgeport, Conn.)

Poli's Palace (Bridgeport, Conn.)

Subject tracings

Bridgeport, Conn.

Theaters--Connecticut

Theater--United States--History--19th century

Theater--United States--History--20th century

Detailed box and folder listing

Box 1

Series I, Theatre programs, tickets, and ephemera

1. Belknap, undated
2. Eden Musee, 1898; 1906
3. Elite theatre, 1936
4. Hippodrome Theatre, 1921
5. Jackson's Theatre, 1910
6. Jackson's Theatre, 1910
7. Jackson's Theatre, 1911
8. Lyric Theatre, 1913
9. Lyric Theatre, 1915

10. Lyric Theatre, 1923-1924
11. Lyric Theatre, 1928
12. Lyric Theatre, 1940 and undated
13. Park City Theatre, "The Stage" playbills, 1878-1901
14. Park City Theatre, 1898-1902
15. Park City Theatre, undated
16. Park Theatre, 1911
17. Park Theatre, 1911
18. Park Theatre, 1911
19. Park Theatre, 1911
20. Park Theatre, 1912
21. Park Theatre, 1912
22. Park Theatre, 1912
23. Park Theatre, 1914
24. Park Theatre, 1915-1916

OS Drawer

1. Mounted clippings of theatre cast lists from various Bridgeport theatres, 1899-1902

Box 2

1. Park Theatre, 1920-1921
2. Park Theatre, 1910s-1920s
3. Poli's Theatre original opening ceremonies, 1922
4. Rialto Theatre, 1928
5. Rivoli theatre, 1936
6. Smith's Theatre, 1906
7. Smith's Theatre, 1907
8. Smith's Theatre, 1907
9. Smith's Theatre, 1908
10. Smith's Theatre, 1908
11. Smith's Theatre, 1908
12. Smith's Theatre, 1909
13. Smith's Theatre, 1909
 - Series II, Photographs
14. Photographs, Colonial Theatre
15. Photographs, Globe Theatre
16. Photographs, Loew's Poli
17. Photographs, Lyric Theatre
18. Photographs, Majestic Theatre
19. Photographs, Merritt Theatre/Warner Theatre Company
20. Photographs, Palace Theatre
21. Photographs, Park Theatre
22. Photographs, Poli's
23. Photographs, Performers