Theatre Guild, Inc. collection regarding William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song* 1939-1940

**Abstract:** The Theatre Guild Inc. collection regarding William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song* consists of .3 linear feet of material dating between 1939 and 1940 and includes a playscript, contracts, and a photograph from Broadway production of the play directed by American author, playwright, and composer of Armenian descent William Saroyan and American actor, playwright, and producer Eddie Dowling.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 627
Creator: Theatre Guild.
Title: Theatre Guild, Inc. collection regarding William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song*
Inclusive Dates: 1939-1940
Extent: .3 linear feet and oversize removals (1 box)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 627, Theatre Guild Inc. collection regarding William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song*, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes; Removals: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversized boxes (20 inches)
Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/
Source: Purchase, September 2010.
Processing: Processed and encoded by Julia Pompetti, November 2010.
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Biographical Note

American author, playwright, and composer of Armenian descent William Saroyan (1908-1981) is known for his interest in the American worker and his romantic portrayals of American life. Many of his works deal with his Armenian heritage and his childhood city of Fresno, California.

Born in 1908 to Armenian immigrants who had settled in Fresno, Saroyan's childhood was a tumultuous one, with Saroyan and his siblings spending time in an orphanage after the death of their father in 1911. After dropping out of high school, Saroyan worked a series of menial jobs before publishing his first short story in 1928. This event marked the beginning of Saroyan’s literary career. His first, and best known, book of short stories *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* was published in 1934 with the titular story winning the O. Henry Award the same year. He continued to publish short stories, writing by his own estimation approximately 100 per year between 1934 and 1939.

As with short stories, he wrote plays with equal speed. During the 1939-1940 season Saroyan wrote and had produced four plays, including *The Time of Our Lives*, awarded the Pulitzer Prize; however, the award was rejected by Saroyan. During that same year he wrote and directed *Love's Old Sweet Song*. Saroyan's plays have been variously described by critics as surreal, metatheatrical and sentimental.

Saroyan continued to write plays, short stories, and novels through the 1940s and 1950s. He wrote the screenplay for *The Human Comedy* in 1943 for which he won an Academy Award. *The Human Comedy* was also published as a novel that same year. Saroyan married and divorced American actress Carol Grace (1932-2003) twice, their first marriage lasting from 1943 to 1949, and their second from 1951 to 1952. They had two children, poet Aram Saroyan and actress Lucy Saroyan. Along with the breakup of his marriage, Saroyan struggled with drinking, gambling, and debts during the 1950s. Despite his hardships, he continued to publish and wrote three autobiographies between 1961 and his death in 1981 of cancer.

Sources:


The Theatre Guild Inc. collection regarding William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song* consists of .3 linear feet of material dating between 1939 and 1940 and includes a playscript; contracts with Saroyan, director Eddie Dowling, and composer Paul Bowles; and a promotional photograph from the Broadway production of the play. The collection is organized into three series: I. Playscripts; II. Contracts; and III. Photographs.

Written by Saroyan, *Love's Old Sweet Song* is a farcical case of mistaken identity in which a middle-aged spinster falls in love with a traveling salesman whom she believes sent her a telegram claiming that he loved her since her youth. It was co-produced by American actor, playwright, producer, and composer Eddie Dowling (1889-1976) and The Theatre Guild Inc. and co-directed by Dowling and Saroyan. American composer and author Paul Bowles (1910-1999) was contracted to compose incidental music for the play. *Love's Old Sweet Song* was performed at the Plymouth Theater (now named the Gerald Schoenfeld Theater) on Broadway between May 2, 1940, and June 8, 1940. Although it appeared in the same 1939-1940 season as Saroyan’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Time of Your Life*, *Love’s Old Sweet Song* was not considered a success, running only thirteen performances before closing.

Series I. consists of a single undated typescript in blue wrappers of *Love’s Old Sweet Song*. The typescript includes the complete text of the play as well as information on costume design, props, and lighting.

Series II. comprises nine contracts dating between October 1939 to July 1940 relating to the rights management of *Love's Old Sweet Song*. The contracts designate the production rights of the play to Eddie Dowling and the Theatre Guild and the Theatre Guild’s subsequent assignment of Dowling and Saroyan as co-directors. The Theatre Guild also employed Paul Bowles to compose music for the play. There is a letter documenting the receipt of a loan from American film producer George Stevens. Also included is a contract with Samuel French Plays to manage the rights of the play after its Broadway run had closed. Contracts include the signatures of Saroyan, Dowling, Bowles, Stevens and the Theater Guild's business manager Frank Munsell. Items are arranged chronologically, followed by undated material.

Series III. consists of one black and white photograph of Canadian-born American actor Walter Huston (1884-1950) as Barnaby Gaul, the male lead in *Love’s Old Sweet Song*. The photograph is mounted on board and bears the caption: "Walter Huston in, Love’s Old Sweet Song, By William Saroyan."

Dates appearing in brackets are based on the processor’s approximation of date ranges for undated material.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**


**Corporate Names**

Theatre Guild.

**Topical Terms**

American drama--20th century.

**Form/Genre Terms**

Scripts (documents)

Contracts.

Photographs.

**Occupation**

Playwrights.

Producers.

Directors.

**Personal Contributors**


Dowling, Eddie.


**Corporate Contributors**

Samuel French Ltd.

**Related Materials in this Repository**

MSS 163 Paul Bowles papers
Arrangement

I. Playscripts
II. Contracts
III. Photographs
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Playscripts, [circa 1939]

Consists of a single undated typescript in blue wrappers of *Love’s Old Sweet Song*. The typescript includes the complete text of the play as well as information on costume design, props, and lighting.

Typescript, [circa 1939] [Box 1 F1] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversized boxes (20 inches).)

Series II. Contracts, 1939-1940

Comprises nine contracts dating between October 1939 and July 1940 relating to the rights management of *Love’s Old Sweet Song*. The contracts designate the production rights of the play to Eddie Dowling and the Theatre Guild and the Theatre Guild’s subsequent assignment of Dowling and Saroyan as co-directors. The Theatre Guild also employed Paul Bowles to compose music for the play. There is a letter documenting the receipt of a loan from American film producer George Stevens. Also included is a contract with Samuel French Plays to manage the rights of the play after its Broadway run had closed. Contracts include the signatures of Saroyan, Dowling, Bowles, Stevens and the Theatre Guild's business manager Frank Munsell. Items are arranged chronologically, followed by undated material.

Dramatic production contract and minimum basic agreement between Saroyan and Dowling, 1939 October 1 [Box 1 F2]

Signed by Saroyan and Dowling and includes three sections of revisions.

Letter of contract by Dowling to Theatre Guild for joint production of play, 1940 February 20 [Box 1 F3]

Signed by Dowling and Warren P. Munsell, business manager of the Theatre Guild.

Letter of contract by Theatre Guild employing Paul Bowles to compose music for the play, [1940] February 20 [Box 1 F4]

Signed by Theatre Guild business manager Warren Munsell and Paul Bowles. There are two minor corrections made to the letter, each initialed by the signers.

Contract by Theatre Guild employing Saroyan as co-director, 1940 February 21 [Box 1 F5]

Signed by Munsell and Saroyan.

Contract by Theatre Guild employing Dowling as co-director, 1940 February 21 [Box 1 F6]

Signed by Munsell and Dowling.

Contract amendment extending date of production, 1940 March 1 [Box 1 F7]

Signed by Munsell and Saroyan.
Series II.

Loan agreement between Theatre Guild and George Stevens, 1940 April 8 [Box 1 F8]

Details the loan of $5,000 from American film producer George Stevens. There are provisions for the loan of additional money as well as the portion of the play's profits to which Stevens is entitled. The contract is signed by Munsell and Stevens.

Contract between Samuel French Plays Inc. and Saroyan, Dowling and Theatre Guild for rights to amateur production rights, 1940 July 27 [Box 1 F9] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversized boxes (20 inches).)

Signed by Saroyan, Dowling, Munsell and Samuel French secretary Frank Shiel.

Assignment of production rights to Theatre Guild Inc. by Dowling, [circa 1939-1940] [Box 1 F10]

Signed by Saroyan, Dowling and Dramatists' Guild assistant secretary Don Angus Douglas.

Series III. Photographs, [circa 1940]

Consists of one black and white photograph of Canadian-born American actor Walter Huston (1884-1950) as Barnaby Gaul, the male lead in Love's Old Sweet Song. The photograph is mounted on board and bears the caption: "Walter Huston in, Love's Old Sweet Song, By William Saroyan."

Publicity photograph, [circa 1940] [Box 1 F11] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversized boxes (20 inches).)