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BARBARA BARRETT

PAPERS

COLL-178

Arranged and described by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Scope and Content	2
Restrictions	2
Custodial History	2
Extent	2
Biography	3
Arrangement	7
Description	7
File List	8

Scope and Content

Barbara Barrett has been involved in theatre in Newfoundland since she arrived from England in 1946. She started with a children's dance school in Curling and has worked with school children and adults in Stephenville, Corner Brook, Gander and St. John's. She either formed or nurtured drama troupes in all these places including the Avion Players of Gander. In 1975 she became artistic director of the Basement Theatre at the Arts and Culture Centre in St. John's and staged over 1000 performances there before she retired in 1991. She continues to direct plays on a volunteer basis. Much of this work is documented in this collection as is her work as a journalist for *The Western Star* newspaper. This latter work included a war brides' column, a tots and teens column, and feature articles on prominent people stopping over at Gander airport. The progress of the television station at Harmon Air Force Base is also included.

This collection would be of interest to anyone researching theatre history in the province, especially the history of the Basement Theatre and should be consulted in conjunction with COLL-173, the Basement Theatre collection. It would also be of interest to those researching the history of Gander, and early television history as it relates to Stephenville.

See also: Coll-173

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on access, however, users should be aware that copyright laws and regulations apply.

Custodial History

Deposited by Barbara Barrett June and July 1993 and February 1994.

Extent

37 cm. and two out-sized boxes containing a prop and a set model.

Biography

Barbara Bettine Barrett was born in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England on November 3, 1922, the daughter of Edith Eveline Dredge and Irvin Micklethwaite. She attended Greenhead High School and the local technical college. Her mother, who was a strong supporter of the local repertory group, introduced her early on to the world of theatre. She learned to dance, perform, write scripts and direct through the Methodist Church, and credits her life-long interest in theatre to those early influences, particularly one church lady who was especially interested in people and passed that interest on to her. At age 18 she was writing and directing church and school plays.

Barbara “was an Air-Raid Warden for three years during World War II (one of the first women to volunteer). Volunteering in another wartime capacity, she and a friend worked on a farm during their holidays to help during the labour shortage. It was while there that she met her future husband, Arthur, who was stationed at Tholthorpe with the 6th Group, Bomber Command. Arthur was a Newfoundlander, so in 1946 his wife and 11-month old daughter sailed from Liverpool on the Swedish ship *Drottningholm* to join him in Curling. Arthur’s mother was a Scottish war bride from the First World War and she made her daughter-in-law very welcome.”¹ In Curling, for her first efforts, she started dancing and singing classes and formed a children’s group called the Joystars: “I had a class and I put together a bit of drama and dance and did some shows, at that time quite big shows, in Curling and Corner Brook.”² She wrote columns for *The Western Star* called “Tots & Teens” (under the pseudonym Ivy Joyce, the first names of her two best friends in England) and “War Brides Corner,” which then editor, Burn Gill, asked her to do.

From 1948 to 1957, the Barretts were in Gander, where Arthur was manager of Radio Station VORG (later CBG when Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949). There they founded the Gander Community Centre Dramatics Club, which was not a performing company, but rather a group of people interested in theatre. In August 1954, Barbara arranged a meeting at her home, issuing an open invitation to anyone interested in forming a dramatic troupe. Only 11 people showed up, so she called another meeting at the Terminal Theatre in the old terminal building, which nearly 30 people attended. Members of the first executive were: John Dean, President; Harold Cahill, Vice-President; Alicia Eaton, Secretary; Gerry Wakeham, Treasurer; Felicity Cochrane (an experienced actress), Director. The troupe began working on several radio plays but, before the first was completed, the Cochranes were transferred to New York. Barbara Barrett was then appointed Director. Their first radio play, “Bump On A Log,” a comedy by Elsie Gowan, was produced by Arthur Barrett soon after. Their first stage effort was “Up At Minty’s” performed June 20, 1955.

¹ *What's Happening*, 17 (6): 5, December 1992.

² *Newfoundland Herald*, 35 (8): 10, February 23-29, 1980.

In Gander, Barbara directed a series of radio plays and was a member of the choral group, Skyway Singers. She also taught drama in the schools on a volunteer basis and directed high school and children's theatre. She continued with *The Western Star* as correspondent, interviewing and reporting on international figures whose flights took them through Gander, and was correspondent for the International News Service of New York and the Canadian Press. She also continued her "Tots and Teens" column and another called "Gander Notes."

The Barretts moved to Stephenville in January 1957, when Arthur took up the position of manager of the new CBC television station, CFSN-TV at Harmon Air Force Base. (The American base wanted a television station but could not get a licence themselves so they brought in the CBC. Thus, Stephenville was home of the first television station in western Newfoundland.) There, Barbara was moderator of "Face To Face In Newfoundland," a public affairs program on CFSN-TV which aired live on Wednesdays at 8:45 pm.

On March 8, 1957, she held a meeting at her home to form a drama group, the Stephenville Players, to compete in the Provincial Drama Festival. Ten people attended and the following committee members were elected: Alex McIntosh, President; Florence White, Convenor; Lillian Dingwell, Secretary; Pete Armstrong, Vice-President; Helen White, Treasurer and Prompter; Larry Cundall, Stage Manager; Arthur Barrett, Business Manager; Margie Oake, Social Convenor; Doris Cundall, make-up and costumes.

In Stephenville, Barbara worked part-time for Memorial University Extension Service as secretary and as a teacher of evening courses. She also taught speech and singing at the Amalgamated School on a voluntary basis. She was the local correspondent for *The Western Star* newspaper, was a contributing writer for the Officers' Wives Club magazine *Howl*, and served on the committee of the first Stephenville Film Council. She was a member of the original committee which started a company of Girl Guides in the community and served as Captain of 2nd Company of Girl Guides for two years, then Captain of 1st Air Ranger Flight. She went on to become Area Commissioner for the west coast and Air Ranger Commissioner for Newfoundland. She helped found and served as vice-president of the Stephenville branch of the St. John Ambulance Association and was director of the Canadian Cancer Society. She was president of the Northern Voice Toastmistress Club, was a founding member of the Terra Nova Toastmistress Club and in 1962 was the first place winner in the overseas speech contest of Toast Mistress International held in San Antonio, Texas. She served on the executive of Xi Gamma Chapter, Beta Sigma Phi as well as Delta Chapter and was president of the Home and School Association of the Amalgamated School. She conducted the choir of St. Augustine's Anglican Church and served on the vestry in the position of secretary of the parish council. In the early 1960s, she was a nominee for the Stephenville citizen of the year award.

From 1964 to 1973, the Barretts lived in Corner Brook where Arthur was manager of CBC TV operations. Barbara hosted a CBYT-TV interview show called "Face To Face." It aired

Thursdays at 7:30 pm. She was a member of the Corner Brook Playmakers and organized the Junior Playmakers Little Theatre for children aged 5 - 13. She also took on the mounting of a summer festival at the Corner Brook Arts and Culture Centre.

In 1973, the Barretts moved to St. John's where Barbara quickly became involved in local theatre. In 1974, she was asked to serve for three months as the acting administrator of the Corner Brook Arts and Culture Centre while George Neil was on sick leave. Then in 1975, she was appointed Artistic Director of the Basement Theatre of the St. John's Arts and Culture

Centre. During her career there, she was responsible for presenting 1014 shows which included both professional and amateur productions. Up to 1991, she had directed more than 40 plays. She has adjudicated numerous high school and adult drama festivals. Besides writing plays for various groups, she has also written instructional guides in playmaking for the 4-H Movement. She nurtured such local talent as Joan Morrissey, Maxim Mazumdar, Codco, Sylvia Wigh, Jim Payne, Ed Kavanagh, Michael Cook, and countless local theatre groups and schools.

Barbara was also artistic director of the annual Summer Festival for nine years and co-wrote the scripts for the 1880 series of shows. She directed cultural activities for the Canada Summer Games '77 and co-chaired Soiree '88, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of municipal government in St. John's. This latter work involved two years of volunteer work on her part organizing all the cultural activities for the event. She employed over 400 people and used the limited budget to give each of them a small honorarium.

In the 1980s, Barbara served on the committee which developed the performing arts course for the province's high schools. This involved two years of her time researching and compiling material. She was not financially reimbursed for this work which included travelling to Gander each month to meet with the other committee members, all of whom were teachers.

During the winter and spring of 1992 (the program ended in July 1992) on Sunday afternoons at 2:30, Barbara Barrett hosted a half-hour program on VOWR Radio in which she interviewed singers, dancers, directors and back stage people who were involved in the production of musical theatre in St. John's during the previous 30 years. The program was called "Curtain Going Up" and the interviews were interspersed with music from Broadway musicals. These tapes have been transferred to MUNFLA, Acc. No. 93-250.

Over the years, Barbara has won many directing awards. In April 1967, she was awarded the best director and best over-all production awards in the Regional Inter-Church One-Act Drama Festival held in Deer Lake. In October that year, she won similar awards in the Playmakers One-Act Drama Festival. In 1972, she won best director for *The Cave Dwellers* at the Newfoundland Drama Festival. In 1973, she was chosen best director in the Drama Festival and won the Newfoundland Drama Council scholarship to study directing and stage design at York University. She also trained under several prominent directors at Bishop Otter College, Chichester, England, and Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Upon her retirement in 1991, John Perlin, former Director of Cultural Affairs, wrote, "It might be said that Ms. Barrett has been one of the unsung heroines of the Newfoundland cultural scene. During her long career, she has played a major role in the promotion of theatrical activity in a number of Newfoundland communities." He went on to say of the many theatre companies that performed in the Basement Theatre, "The list is endless and the variety infinite thanks largely to Ms. Barrett's innovative, imaginative and above all caring programming of the past 16 years. There is no question she has left some big theatrical shoes to be filled and her deft touch will be sorely missed in Basement Theatre."³ John Holmes, theatre critic, wrote, "The shows that she produced and directed herself and the young companies that she encouraged and even reared, gave scores of young actors and directors the opportunity to try out their skills; many of them have gone forward to more ambitious projects. Indeed, Barbara Barrett should be awarded a

³ *Evening Telegram*, 21 July 1991: 19.

medal for putting up with all the trials and tribulations and even the struggles of turning a small, bare rehearsal room into a viable acting space for local productions, accommodating the audience in reasonable comfort.”⁴

Barbara has been quoted as saying, “Newfoundland has offered me lots of opportunities, and a chance to experiment. It’s a great place to develop dreams.”⁵

⁴ *Evening Telegram*, 27 September 1991: 28.

⁵ *What's Happening*, 17 (6): 5, December 1992.

Arrangement

In June 1993, Barbara Barrett deposited in the Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives audio cassettes of 19 interviews that she had conducted for radio station VOWR with people involved in the production of musical theatre in Newfoundland. These and a 33 1/3 rpm audio disc entitled *Professor Fuddle's Fantastic Fairy Tale Machine* deposited in February 1994 have been transferred to MUNFLA, accession numbers 93-250 and 94-057. Copies of the tapes have been returned to Mrs. Barrett. In 1993, she also deposited photographs, a prop from *The Emperor's Nightingale* and the set model for *Noah*. She also allowed the Archives to photocopy 22 scrapbooks which detail her involvement with the performing arts in the province from 1947 to 1993. In February 1994, she deposited other material including scripts for the 1880s plays, scripts for Home Brew shows, the script *On the Tail of a Comet* written for the 75th Anniversary of the Girl Guides of Canada, course material for the high school course Performing Arts 2200, and play making instructional guides for leaders and members of the 4-H movement. Photocopies have been made of the scrapbooks, the scripts *1885* and *On The Tail of a Comet*, and the two *Let's Make a Play* instructional books and the originals returned to Mrs. Barrett.

Description

SERIES

1.0 PERFORMING ARTS INVOLVEMENT, 1947-1993

SUBSERIES

1.0 PERFORMING ARTS INVOLVEMENT, 1947-1993

- 1.01 Scrapbooks (photocopied from originals)
- 1.02 Summer Festival Material
- 1.03 Programs and Handbills (cross-indexed in COLL-138)
- 1.04 Scripts (except Summer Festival)
- 1.05 Theatre Arts 2200
- 1.06 Instructional Guides for 4-H Movement
- 1.07 Photographs

1.08 Audio Visual Material

1.09 Other Material

File List

1.0 PERFORMING ARTS INVOLVEMENT, 1947-1993

1.01 Scrapbooks (photocopied from originals)

1.01.001	1947 - 1948
1.01.002	1948 - 1950
1.01.003	1956 - 1964
1.01.004	1957 - 1969
1.01.005	1968 - 1978
1.01.006	1969 - 1972
1.01.007	1970 - 1981
1.01.008	1972 - 1976
1.01.009	1978 - 1979
1.01.010	1979 - 1980
1.01.011	1980
1.01.012	1980 - 1981
1.01.013	1981 - 1982
1.01.014	1982 - 1983
1.01.015	1982 - 1983, Theatre 4 Youth
1.01.016	1983 - 1985
1.01.017	1985 - 1986
1.01.018	1986 - 1988
1.01.019	1988 - 1990
1.01.020	1990 - 1991
1.01.021	1991 - 1993
1.01.022	1993

1.02 Summer Festival Material

1.02.001	"1884" script
1.02.002	"1885" script
1.02.003	"1886" script
1.02.004	"1887" script
1.02.005	"1888" script
1.02.006	News clippings, press releases, publicity
1.02.007	Prop for <i>The Emperor's Nightingale</i> , part of <i>The Story Tellers</i> , Summer Festival '79, July 18(?) - 21, 1979, sets by Wally Brandts, directed by Barbara Barrett (located: Box 4 in L3001)

1.03 Programs and Handbills (cross-indexed in COLL-138)

1.04 Scripts (except Summer Festival)

- 1.04.001 "On The Tail of a Comet" script
- 1.04.002 Home Brew scripts

1.05 Theatre Arts 2200

- 1.05.001 Course Description, Department of Education, Division of Instruction, Feb. 1982
- 1.05.002 Drafts of Course Description
- 1.05.003 Responses to proposed course outline from people involved in theatre
- 1.05.004 Photocopy of "Curriculum Guidelines: Dramatic Arts: Intermediate and Senior Divisions" Ontario Ministry of Education

1.06 Instructional Guides for 4-H Movement, written by Barbara Barrett in co-operation with the Youth Services Division of the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Culture, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1979

- 1.06.001 *Let's Make a Play*, Member's Guide
- 1.06.002 *Let's Make a Play*, Leader's Guide

1.07 Photographs

1.08 Audio Visual Material

- 1.08.001 Ten 90-minute audio cassettes of 19 interviews concerning musical theatre in Newfoundland, broadcast on radio station VOWR (transferred to MUNFLA, Acc. No. 93-250). Following is a list of the interviews:

- Tape 1, Side 1, No. 1: Marg Hitchins, "Fiddler On the Roof"
- Tape 1, Side 2, No. 2: Robert Power, "Oklahoma"
- Tape 2, Side 1, No. 3: Marie Sharpe, "Mikado"
- Tape 2, Side 2, No. 4: Geoff Seymour, "Brigadoon"
- Tape 3, Side 1, No. 5: Louise Nugent, "Music Man"
- Tape 3, Side 2, No. 6: Ronald Hutton MacDonald, "Sound of Music"
- Tape 4, Side 1, No. 7: Tom Cahill, "Annie Get Your Gun"
- Tape 4, Side 2, No. 8: Lorraine Smith, "Gypsy"
- Tape 5, Side 1, No. 9: John O'Mara, "Pirates of Penzance"
- Tape 5, Side 2, No. 10: Steve Jackson, "Ain't Misbehaving"
- Tape 6, Side 1, No. 11: Sheri Dwyer (Learning), "South Pacific"
- Tape 6, Side 2, No. 12: Tom Ryan, "My Fair Lady"
- Tape 7, Side 1, No. 13: Tessa Crosbie, "The Pajama Game"
- Tape 7, Side 2, No. 14: Denys Ferry, "Finian's Rainbow"

Tape 8, Side 1, No. 15: Clar Doyle, "Cats"
 Tape 8, Side 2, No. 16: Jacintha Graham, "Man of La Mancha"
 Tape 9, Side 1, No. 17: Ed MacLean, "Jesus Christ Superstar"
 Tape 9, Side 2, No. 18: Dr. Bert Davis, "Merry Widow"
 Tape 10, Side 1, No. 19: Bob Petrie, "King & I"

1.08.002 33-1/3 rpm audio disc, "Professor Fuddle's Fantastic Fairy Tale Machine," composed by Paul Bradbury with some segments adapted from Shakespeare, Periwinkle Records, Don Mills, ON, 1974 (transferred to MUNFLA, Acc. No. 94-057)

1.09 Other Material

1.09.001 Miscellaneous items: reviews; clippings; press release; poster; Basement Theatre winter schedule, 1975; poem: "Eat Your Heart Out"

1.09.002 *First Prize Entries in Government Arts and Letters Competition*, 1974, 1975 and 1976 (transferred to CNS)

1.09.003 Profiles of performing arts people from *Newfoundland Herald TV Week* and *Newfoundland TV Topics*, 1978-1979

1.09.004 Set model and clippings for *Noah*, Feb. 11, 1981, St. John's Arts and Culture Centre, directed by Barbara Barrett (located: Box 3)