Guide to the Helena Modjeska Collection MS.R.037

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Note
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Date (inclusive): circa 1876-1989 and undated
Abstract: The artificial collection comprises primary and secondary source materials on Helena Modjeska, a nineteenth-century Polish stage actress who had a successful career in the United States. Most items pertain to her stage career, while others provide insight into Modjeska's life at her Santiago Canyon ranch, Arden, in Orange County, California. Primary sources include original and photocopied Modjeska correspondence, ephemera, programs and playbills, photographs, scrapbooks, and artifacts, including a hand-written book of fairy tales. Secondary sources include biographical information on Modjeska in newspaper clippings, manuscripts typescripts, and published journal articles written by a number of authors.
Access
Processed components of the collection are open for research. Unprocessed additions may contain restricted materials. Please contact the Department of Special Collections and Archives in advance to request access. Researchers must use preservation photocopies of restricted fragile items in Box 3.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.
Acquisition Information
Acquisition Information
Materials originally from MS-R148 (Collection of Helena Modjeska theater memorabilia) were acquired from a dealer in 2009 with funds from the Elizabeth and Verle Annis Library Endowment Fund.
Processing History
Biography
Helena Modjeska was born Helena Opid on October 12, 1840 in Krakow, Poland. Her interest in acting began at a young age, and she left school early to train with a local actor. Under the management of Gustave Sinnmayer Modrzejewski, she made her theatrical debut as Helena Modrzejewska in Bochnia, Poland in 1861. Although she had two children by Modrzejewski, they never married, and after the death of her three-year old daughter in 1865, she left him and returned to Krakow with her young son Ralph.
As a member of a local theater company in Krakow, Modrzejewska’s fame continued to grow as the company toured Poland. It was during one such tour that she met Karol Bozenta Chlapowski, a young Polish aristocrat who had recently spent a year in a Prussian prison for participating in revolutionary activities. They were married in September 1868, and with Chlapowski now managing her business affairs, the couple moved to Warsaw. As the leading actress of the Russian-controlled Imperial Theater in Warsaw, Modrzejewska played 284 roles over the course of six years. Although Modrzejewska’s position brought professional success, the strenuous workload was detrimental to her health. It was at this time that Modrzejewska, at the urging of friends, decided to visit the United States in an effort to regain her strength, and possibly to seek a career on the American stage. Chlapowski, who hoped to establish a colony of Polish emigrants in California, eagerly embraced the plan.
The members of Chlapowski’s Polish colony (eight in all) settled in Santa Ana, on a small rented farm not far from Anaheim, in October 1876. In January 1877, Modrzejewska left for San Francisco in hopes of re-establishing her theatrical career. After studying English for only four months, she felt confident enough to audition for her first role. With her name anglicized to Helena Modjeska, she then made a highly successful American debut in Adrienne Lecouvreur at San Francisco’s California Theater in August 1877. For the next thirty years (excepting intermittent periods of illness), Modjeska toured the United States and Europe, establishing a reputation as one of the greatest dramatic actresses of the late nineteenth century.

By March 1878 Chlapowski’s Polish colony, its members unsuited to pioneer life, had disbanded. Chlapowski (who had adopted the name of Count Charles Bozenta Chlapowski upon his arrival in the United States) resumed his personal management of Modjeska’s career. Together they would make numerous successful tours of Europe and America from 1878 through 1907. Lauded on both continents for her performances in plays such as Macbeth, As You Like It, Mary Stuart, and Camille, Modjeska’s leading men included both Edwin Booth and Maurice Barrymore. As a result of her European tours, Modjeska’s circle of friends grew to include such notables as Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and the pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski.

During the American theatrical season, Modjeska traveled from town to town in a private railway car with her company and her managers. Although they adopted the Clarendon Hotel in New York City as their headquarters, they were frequent visitors to Southern California as well, often staying at the Santiago Canyon ranch of their close friends, the Pleasants family.

By 1887 Modjeska had declared in both newspaper interviews and letters that she wished to make Southern California her permanent home. The following year, she and Chlapowski purchased a large piece of property (adding to the property they had already purchased from the Pleasants in previous years) in Santiago Canyon and commissioned architect Stanford White to remodel and add to the existing cottage. Soon after its completion, Modjeska named it “Arden” after the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare’s As You Like It. Between Modjeska’s theatrical tours of Europe and the United States, they would spend a great deal of time at Arden entertaining friends and family from all over the world. Bozenta, determined that Arden be a working ranch, continued to purchase acreage surrounding their property in the hopes of raising successful groves of olive trees. Like the earlier farming ventures of the Polish colony, however, Bozenta’s olive groves failed to prosper.

Despite her frequent absences from Arden, Modjeska played an active part in Orange County life when she was in residence. She enjoyed close friendships with Orange County pioneers such as the Rice, McCoy, and Yoch families. On more than one occasion she appeared in benefit productions at French’s Opera House in Santa Ana with local amateurs she had trained herself.

In May 1903, after her last acting season in Poland, Modjeska’s career appeared to be fading, and she was unable to find work for almost two years. In 1905, her old protégé Paderewski arranged a testimonial concert for Modjeska at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York as a tribute to her long-time devotion to the American theater. The testimonial raised $10,000 for Modjeska and enabled her to obtain a theatrical contract for the next two years.

In the spring of 1906, Modjeska and her husband sold Arden and its surrounding property (totaling 1,341 acres) to a Long Beach investment company which planned to develop it into a country club. After their final theatrical tour in 1907, they rented a furnished house in Tustin where Modjeska began her memoirs. The following year, the couple purchased a small beach cottage on Bay Island in Newport Bay, and it was here that Modjeska completed her memoirs. On April 8, 1909, less than two months after her final stage appearance at a benefit performance in Los Angeles, Modjeska died at her Bay Island home. After funeral services at St. Vibiana’s Cathedral in Los Angeles, Modjeska was buried in Krakow, Poland. Immediately after her death, a distraught Count Bozenta engaged Ernest Phillips, a Santa Ana actor who had performed with Modjeska during her final theatrical tour, to aid him in packing up Modjeska’s things. Bozenta also gave him several mementos of Modjeska’s career, and Phillips later created a scrapbook of the memorabilia from his stage work with Modjeska. Bozenta died in 1914, scarcely five years after his wife, and was buried next to her in Krakow.

Arden and its surrounding acreage went through a number of owners until it was finally sold (with the original property size greatly reduced because of a number of subdivisions) to the Charles S. Walker family of Long Beach in 1923. In 1986, descendants of the Walker family sold the Modjeska house and 14.4 acres of land to the County of Orange so that it might be preserved and developed as a historic park. Today it appears on the National Register of Historic Places and is California State Landmark #205. In addition, the two-mile stretch of Santiago Canyon once owned by Orange County’s most famous actress is now known as Modjeska Canyon.

1840 Born Helena Opid in Krakow, Poland on October 12th.
1861 Gave birth to son Ralph by her stage manager Gustave Sinnmayer Modrzejewski.
1861 The White Camellia
1861 | Established the New Sandec Company (included her sister and several brothers) with Modrzejewski and successfully toured neighboring Polish towns.
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1865 | Left Modrzejewski after the death of her three-year old daughter Marylka and moved back to Krakow with her son.
1868 | Married Charles Bozenta Chlapowski.
1868 | Became the leading lady of the Russian-controlled Imperial Theater in Warsaw for six years.
1876 | Modrzejewska and Chlapowski sailed to America with a small group of friends in order to establish a Polish immigrant colony in Southern California.
1876 | Chlapowski took the name of Count Charles Bozenta Chlapowski upon arrival in the United States, but would be more commonly known as Count Bozenta.
1876 | Members of Polish colony took up residence at a small rented farm near Anaheim.
1877 | Left to study English in San Francisco in January.
1878 | Her success continued with appearances in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington D.C.
1878 | The Polish colony experiment ended in March, and Bozenta joined Modjeska and her son in New York to serve as her personal representative.
1879 | After her second year on the American stage, Modjeska returned to her native Poland for a winter of theatrical appearances.
1880 | Heartsease, an adaptation of Camille
1880 | Spent the next two seasons acting in London.
1882 | Modjeska and her husband returned to America, and she began the first of several seasons with Maurice Barrymore (father of Lionel, Ethel, and John) as her leading man.
1883 | At the close of the theatrical season, Modjeska and her husband returned to Southern California for a vacation at the Santiago Canyon ranch of the Joseph E. Pleasants family.
1883 | Bozenta purchased a half-interest in the ranch in the hopes of starting a joint cattle-raising venture with Joseph E. Pleasants.
1884 | Modjeska and her husband returned to Europe in the early summer.
1884 | On a visit to Poland, the couple befriended pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski and helped him to further his musical studies in Vienna.
1885 | After a series of theatrical engagements in Europe, the couple returned home and began another American tour.
1886 | With Barrymore as her leading man, Modjeska played in Los Angeles for the first time.
1887 | At the end of the year, Bozenta purchased additional property next to the acreage he already owned jointly with Pleasants.
1888 | After the death of Pleasants' wife, the couple purchased the remaining half-interest in the ranch (160 acres) and 134 acres of an adjoining homestead.
1888 | Modjeska and her husband commissioned New York architect Stanford White to remodel and add to the existing cottage on the Pleasants' property.
1889 | Spent a large part of this year and the following year touring American theaters with Edwin Booth (brother of Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth) considered at the time to be America's finest actor.
1890-1891 | On tour in both Europe and on the East coast of the United States.
1892 | Returned to Arden.
1892 | Modjeska scandalized by the murder of Arden ranch manager William McKelvery by farmhand Francisco Torres, who was later hanged by an angry mob.
1894 | Upon completion of their American tour, Modjeska and her company performed in Los Angeles, and Modjeska appeared in a benefit performance at French's Opera House in Santa Ana.
1895 | Russian edict of banishment issued against Modjeska forbidding her entry into Russian-controlled Poland. She was never again allowed to act in Warsaw.
1896 | Returned to Arden in March for convalescence after suffering a slight stroke two months earlier while on tour in Cincinnati.
1897 | Modjeska ill much of the year.
1897 | Mary Stuart
1898 | Antony and Cleopatra
1899 | Marie Antoinette
1900  Construction began on a dam in Harding Canyon to conserve water and provide a source of irrigation for Bozenta's olive groves. Completed the following year, it failed to save Bozenta's olive trees.

1902  Modjeska and her husband departed for Poland in the fall and remained there until the following spring. It was her last acting season in Poland.

1903-1904  Modjeska unable to obtain a contract for the coming American theatrical season.

1905  Former protégé Ignace Jan Paderewski arranged testimonial concert honoring Modjeska and her devotion to the American theater and raised $10,000.

1905  Modjeska's appearance attracted the attention of stage managers who offered her a contract allowing her to extend her career for two more years beginning that fall.

1906  Arden and its surrounding acreage sold to a Long Beach investment company which planned to open a country club on the property.

1906  Departed for final theatrical tour of cities in the Eastern United States in September.

1907  Modjeska and her husband took up residence in a furnished house in Tustin.

1908  The couple moved to a small beach cottage they had purchased on Bay Island in East Newport.

1908  Modjeska completed her memoirs.

1909  Modjeska appeared at a Los Angeles benefit performance for the victims of the Messina, Italy earthquake. It was her last stage appearance.

1909  Died April 8th at her home on Bay Island. Funeral services held at St. Vibiana's Cathedral in Los Angeles, and Modjeska was later buried in her native Krakow.

1914  Bozenta died in Poland and was buried next to his wife.

1923  Arden sold to the Charles S. Walker family of Long Beach.

1986  Descendants of the Walker family sold Arden and 14.4 acres of land to the County of Orange for preservation and development as a historic park.

Collection Scope and Content Summary
The artificial collection comprises primary and secondary source materials on Helena Modjeska, a nineteenth-century Polish stage actress who had a successful career in the United States. Most items pertain to her stage career, while others provide insight into Modjeska's life at her Santiago Canyon ranch, Arden, in Orange County, California. Primary sources include original and photocopied Modjeska correspondence, ephemera, programs and playbills, photographs, scrapbooks, and artifacts, including a hand-written book of fairy tales. Secondary sources include biographical information on Modjeska in newspaper clippings, manuscripts typescripts, and published journal articles written by a number of authors.

Collection Arrangement
The collection is organized into six series. As portions of the collection were the result of significant donations, the collection has been organized to reflect that provenance:

Series 1. Ellen Lee material, 1881-1989 and undated. 0.3 linear feet
Series 2. Ernest Phillips material, 1881-1923 and undated. 0.6 linear feet
Series 3. Writings on Modjeska, 1907-1967 and undated. 0.1 linear feet
Series 4. Printed items, circa 1877-1986 and undated. 0.3 linear feet
Series 5. Photographs, 1883-1891, 1902, circa 1920s and undated. 0.8 linear feet

Accession 2018.035. Photographs and programs unprocessed addition, 1876-1907. 0.2 linear feet

Separation Note
Special Collections and Archives has cataloged separately a small collection of books about Modjeska and a number of volumes from her personal library.

Processing Note
Materials originally housed in MS-R148, Collection of Helena Modjeska theater memorabilia (1 linear foot; 1 box), have been incorporated into this collection. The collection identifier MS-R148 has been reassigned.

Related Collections
Related materials documenting Modjeska's life in Orange County can be found in in the following collections in the Department of Special Collections and Archives:
Don Meadows papers (MS-R001) Rice Family papers (MS-R045) Ellen K. Lee collection on Helena Modjeska and Orange County (MS-R143)
Modjeska's drop-leaf writing desk, which belonged for many years to the Yoch family of Santa Ana, is also housed in Special Collections and Archives.
**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
Cabinet photographs -- 19th century.
Ephemera
Polish Americans -- California - Archives
Actresses -- Poland -- History -- Sources.
Theater -- United States -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Theater programs
Actresses -- United States
Actors.
Scrapbooks
Photographic prints -- 20th century.
Playbills
Photographic prints -- 19th century.
Artifacts
Short stories
Lee, Ellen K.
Chlapowski, Karol
Modjeska, Helena
Phillips, Ernest C. (Ernest Crozier)

**Ellen Lee material** Series 1.42184 1881-1989 and undated
Physical Description: 0.3 Linear Feet
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series comprises primary and secondary source material on Modjeska written or collected by Orange County historian Ellen K. Lee. Primary sources consist of Modjeska correspondence, ephemera, and programs and playbills from her theatrical performances. Also included are typescripts and printed items written by Lee about Modjeska, as well as contemporary and modern photographs of Modjeska and her home, Arden, in Santiago Canyon.
Series Arrangement
This series is arranged by format of material and topically therein.

**Correspondence** 42198
box 1, folder 1
Gilder, Helena, transcriptions of letters dated 1878-1909 from Modjeska and her husband 42201 1959
box 1, folder 2
James, Henry, photocopies of original letters from Modjeska 42200 1891-1892
   Existence and Location of Originals
      Originals are in the collections of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
box 1, folder 3-4
McCoy, letters from Modjeska and her husband 42199 1895-1909
   Physical Description: 2 folders.

**Ephemera** 42192
box 1, folder 5
Memorial card and admittance ticket from Modjeska's funeral 42197 1909
box 1, folder 5
Party invitation 42196 1906
box 1, folder 6
Polish commemorative coin honoring Modjeska 42195 1975
box 1, folder 7
Programs for Modjeska performances 42194 1897-1909
   Scope and Content Note
      1909 program for a Los Angeles benefit performance contains a holograph annotation noting that this was Modjeska's final appearance on the stage.
Ellen Lee material Series 1.421841881-1989 and undated

Photographs 42189

- Sheet music for “To Helen” autographed to Modjeska by Oscar Wilde 42193 1881
- Modjeska portrait, autographed to Mrs. Joseph Yoch 42191 1897
- Modjeska ranch (Arden) in Santiago Canyon, exterior and interior views 42190 1974

Physical Description: 45 color photographs.

Writings by Ellen Lee 42185

- Historical background of the Modjeska house, Modjeska Canyon, Orange County, California 42188 1989
- A Modjeska letter, production file, including edited typescript, for Lee’s keepsake produced for Friends of the Library, University of California, Irvine 42187 1968 and undated

Ernest Phillips material Series 2.42169 1881-1923 and undated

Physical Description: 0.6 Linear Feet

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains materials related to Modjeska’s theatrical career that were collected by Ernest Phillips. It includes correspondence from Modjeska and her Chlapowski, as well as ephemera related to Modjeska and Arden given to Phillips by Chlapowski at Modjeska’s death. Also includes a scrapbook containing Phillips’ personal memorabilia of his theatrical career with Modjeska.

Series Arrangement

This series is arranged by format of material and topically therein.

Correspondence 42178

- Barrett, Lawrence, telegram to Modjeska 42183 1888
- Chlapowski, Karol Bozenta, letter and postcards to Ernest Phillips 42182 1908-1914
- Fisk, Minnie Madden, letter to Modjeska 42181 1892
- Irvine, Henry, letter to Modjeska 42180 undated
- Terry, Ellen, letter to Modjeska 42179 1881

Ephemera 42171

- Memorial card from Modjeska’s funeral 42177 1909
- Modjeska Inn and Modjeska Ranch printed advertisements 42176 1923 and undated
- Programs and advertisements for Modjeska performances 42175 1891-1909 and undated
- Theatrical wig (straight) used by Modjeska in Marie Antoinette 42174 undated
- Theatrical wig (curly) used by Phillips in Macbeth 42173 undated
- Velvet brocade cuff from a Modjeska costume 42172 undated

Scrapbook of clippings, correspondence, photographs, playbills, programs, and typescript reminiscences documenting Phillips’ friendship with Modjeska and the final years of her life 42170 1905-1909 and undated

Writings on Modjeska Series 3.42164 1907-1967 and undated

Physical Description: 0.1 Linear Feet

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series comprises miscellaneous notes and writings on Modjeska, some by Orange County historians.

Series Arrangement

The series is arranged alphabetically by topic or surname of the writer.
Coulter, Mrs. F. E., curator of the Bowers Museum (Santa Ana), miscellaneous notes and correspondence regarding Modjeska 42168 1966-1967 and undated

Madame Modjeska Company touring schedule, typescript 42167 1907

Notes on Modjeska’s family tree 42166 undated

Pleasants, Adalina (Mrs. J. E.), holograph and typescript notes on Modjeska and the Anaheim colony 42165 circa 1920s

Printed items Series 4.42155 circa 1877-1986 and undated

Physical Description: 0.3 Linear Feet

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series contains newspaper clippings and published biographical materials on Modjeska and her husband as well as programs and playbills from selected Modjeska stage roles.

Series Arrangement
The series is arranged by format of material.

Articles on Modjeska in The Burr McIntosh Monthly, Theatre Arts Monthly , Theatre Arts, and Polish American Studies 42163 1906-1974

Biographical sketches and information on Modjeska 42161 1893-1971 and undated

Kyle, Howard, "On tour with Modjeska" 42162 undated

Access
Fragile original is restricted. Researchers must use the preservation photocopy in Box 1, Folder 19.

Clippings on Modjeska and Arden from newspapers, photocopies 42159 1889-1986 and undated

Original clippings 42160 1889-1986

Access
Fragile originals are restricted. Researchers must use the preservation photocopies in Box 1, Folder 20.

Printed picture of Modjeska as Mary Stuart 42158 1888

Programs, playbills, and clippings for performances by Modjeska and her contemporaries, mainly in New York, San Francisco, London, and Chicago 42157 1879-1905 and undated

Publicity poster of Modjeska 78886 circa 1877-1878

Scrapbook of program and playbill clippings for performances by Modjeska, Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, and others, mainly at the Baldwin Theatre in San Francisco 42156 1885-1895

Photographs Series 5.42136 1883-1891, 1902, circa 1920s and undated

Physical Description: 0.8 Linear Feet

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series consists primarily of cabinet card photographs of Modjeska in costume for various stage roles. Also included are photographs of Modjeska and the interior of Arden, her Santiago Canyon home.

Series Arrangement
The series is arranged by format or subject of material.

Cabinet cards 42139 1891 and undated

Adrienne Lecouvreur 42154 undated

Physical Description: 6 items.

As You Like It 42153 undated

Physical Description: 3 items.
Photographs Series 5.421361883-1891, 1902, circa 1920s and undated

- **Camille** 42152 undated
  Physical Description: 10 items.

- **Les Chouans** 42151 undated
  Physical Description: 2 items.

- **Cymbeline** 42150 undated
  Physical Description: 2 items.

- **A Doll's House** 42149 undated
  Physical Description: 3 items.

- **Hamlet** 42148 undated
  Physical Description: 1 item.

- **Mary Stuart** 42147 undated
  Physical Description: 1 item.

- **Merchant of Venice** 42146 undated
  Physical Description: 2 items.

- **Mistress Betty** 42145 undated
  Physical Description: 1 item.

- **Romeo and Juliet** 42144 undated
  Physical Description: 6 items.

- **Richelieu** 42143 undated
  Physical Description: 1 item.

- **Sappho** 42142 undated
  Physical Description: 6 items.

- **Twelfth Night** 42141 undated
  Physical Description: 1 item.

- **Unidentified roles** 42140 1883, 1891 and undated
  Physical Description: 24 items.
  Note
  Includes autographed photographs.

- **Modjeska portraits in a variety of roles** 42138 1883 and undated
  Scope and Content Note
  Includes four photographs of other contemporary actors mounted on the verso of Modjeska photographs.

- **Photographs of Arden** 42137 1902, circa 1920s and undated
  Scope and Content Note
  Includes a "Forest of Arden" brochure.

- **Titi, Nunu i Klembolo czyli Przygody dwóch liliowych chłopczyków i psa o sześciu nogach** 1896
Physical Description: 1 bound volume.

Scope and Contents

This item is a book of fairy tales written and illustrated by Helena Modjeska for her grandson Felix Bozenta Modieski. The English translation of the title is *Titi, Nunu and Klembolo, or the adventures of two lilac boys and a six legged dog*.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Short stories

**Unprocessed addition 2018**  
Accession 2018.035  
1876-1907

Physical Description: 0.2 Linear Feet (1 half legal document box)

Series Scope and Content Summary

The addition to the collection contains photographs of Modjeska, some of which depict her in costume, and programs and advertisements for productions she was in.

Access

This addition to the collection has not been processed but is open for research. Please contact the Department of Special Collections and Archives in advance to request access.