Brandon Thomas-Leverson ArchiveMS.2014.012

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Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library
Title: Brandon Thomas-Leverson Archive
Identifier/Call Number: MS.2014.012
Physical Description: 8 boxes
Date (inclusive): 1850-1983
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 6.3 linear ft, 8 boxes
Abstract: The Brandon Thomas-Leverson Archive is a collection of scrapbooks, photographs, letters, and journals pertaining to the Brandon-Leverson household that was largely compiled by Silvia Brandon Thomas, the daughter of actor and playwright Brandon Thomas. The materials in this collection capture intimate moments within the Brandon-Leverson's family life as well as the family's associations with other fin de siècle artists and writers such as Henry Irving, Oscar Wilde, and W.S. Penley.

William Andrews Clark Memorial Library

Acquisition Information
Purchased from daiaf fine books in 2014.

Separated materials
Printed copies of Brandon Thomas' farce Charley's Aunt were removed from the archive and are catalogued separately. Please consult the Clark Library's holdings on the UCLA online library catalog for more information about how to access these items.

The copies of Charley's Aunt that were originally part of the archive include editions that had been translated into Czech and Italian. The collection also came with a 1st edition copy of Where's Charley?.

Preferred Citation

Biographical / Historical
Brandon Thomas (1848-1914) was a playwright, songwriter, and performer whose farce Charley's Aunt helped him achieve international renown. Born on December 24, 1848 as the first child of Walter Thomas and Hannah Thomas (née Morris), Brandon experienced a childhood of inconsistent financial resources and inconsistent schooling. His father, while a skilled bootmaker, was prone to making rash business endeavors that often left the family financially struggling. By the age of 12, Brandon was removed from school entirely to work as an apprentice at the Liverpool dockyards to provide for his family. His mother ran a small lodging business out of the family's home, with one of the tenants being than unknown stage performer Henry Irving. Irving's relationship with the Thomas family would profoundly inspired Brandon to pursue a similar path.

While working clerical jobs for the next decade of his life, Thomas continued to develop his skills as a performer and writer. He caught the attention of William Grimston and Madge Kendal (together known as "the Kendals"), and was recruited into their company at the Court Theatre in 1879. Thomas went on to tour with Kendal Company in America, receiving popular acclaim for his performance in and writing of the burlesque play "A Pantomime Rehearsal". His magnum opus Charley's Aunt made its premier at the Theater Royal at Bury St. Edmunds in February, 1892. The first run of the play featured popular London comedian W.S. Penley in the role of "Charley's Aunt", becoming an instant hit that met a run of 1,469 performances over the course of 3 years.

Thomas' marriage to Marguerite Leerson was initially met with great disapproval from Marguerite's father James Leerson, but the two eventually married on December 22, 1888. In time, the couple would have four children: Amy Marguerite (born 1890), Jimmy (James) Grant (1894), Jevan Roderick (1898), and Silvia Blanche (1905). Tragically, Jimmy died from injuries sustained as a lieutenant in the early months of WWI. Both Amy and Jevan continued to be actively involved in the family's performing business, and while Silvia was a dancer, actress, and a theatrical manager for an earlier part of her life, she later went on to pursue a career as a journalist at the BBC.

Scope and Contents
This collection features an assortment of handwritten correspondence, photographs, journals, and scrapbooks detailing the public and private happenings of the Thomas-Leverson family, dating mostly between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Much of the written narrative regarding the family's history was produced by the youngest daughter, Silvia Brandon Thomas. The collection contains numerous autograph letters, a great bulk of which are addressed either to
Brandon Thomas or to his daughter Amy from senders of eminent background within the late 19th century London performing scene such as Cyril Maude, Seymour Hicks, and Henry Irving. Photographs comprise the majority of the visual materials within this collection, and as such, the archive offers a view into the types of photographic production and processing methods employed in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries.

**Arrangement**

This collection has been divided into three series:

1. Family Narratives and Recordkeeping
2. Letters and Correspondence
3. Photographs and Other Visual Materials

**Conditions Governing Access**

This collection is open for research.

**Conditions Governing Use**

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**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Thomas, Brandon, 1848-1914
Brandon-Thomas, Silvia
Brandon-Thomas, Jevan, 1898-1977
Thomas, Amy Brandon, 1890-1974
Leverson, Marguerite, 1865-1930

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**Family Narratives and Recordkeeping 1939-1979**

**Scope and Contents**

This series contain materials pertaining to narratives of the Thomas-Leverson family and other sources of recordkeeping. Of particular interest might be a 2-part scrapbook compiled by Brandon's daughter Silvia, which provides an overview of her father life and her family's history.

**Box 3, Box 6**

**Thomas-Leverson family scrapbook 1970-1979**

**Physical Description:** Volume 1 is a 44x32 cm flat black scrapbook with pages sleeved in transparencies. Volume 2 is a 37x31 cm, 31-paged padded blue scrapbook.

**Scope and Contents**

A pair of scrapbooks compiled by Silvia Thomas around the 1970s (as approximated by the dealer). The first scrapbook details her father's childhood and his early years as a stage performer, ending with his marriage to Marguerite Leverson and the birth of their first child Amy. The second scrapbook details the events preceding and following Thomas' production of *Charley's Aunt*, as well as more information regarding the lives of the Thomas-Leverson family's children.
Silvia Brandon Thomas' desk journals 1979-1983
Scope and Contents
A seven-volume series of desk journals detailing the personal and professional life of Silvia Brandon Thomas, the happenings of the Thomas-Leverson family, and life in 20th century Britain at large. The journal entries are often prosaic in content, logging events such as those of Silvia attending a play, family get-togethers, and bouts of illness. The greater English zeitgeist can be perceived in mentions of air raids during WWI and occasional mentions of contemporary events. Some individuals frequently mentioned in Silvia's journal include her mother Marguerite Leverson, her siblings Jevan and Amy, and her friend Kitty (presumably actress Kitty de Legh).
Arrangement
The seven journals are arranged in chronological order from left to right within the box, ending with the summary journal that broadly covers the years between 1905 and 1981. The other 6 volumes span the following date ranges as follows: 1918-1942, 1943-1956, 1957-1966, 1967-June 1972, July 1972-June 1977, July 1977-March 1981, March 1981-March 1982.
Existence and Location of Copies
The first five volumes and a section of the 6th are transcriptions of materials from earlier journals. These transcriptions were done by Silvia in 1979. The content spanning the years 1979-1983 are the original copies. The original journals Silvia created for the years preceding 1979 are not in this collection.

Financial notebook for execution of the will of Mrs. Alma Benvenuta Foa 1978
Scope and Contents
Silvia Brandon Thomas and Guido Coen were named the executors of Foa's will upon her passing on September 2, 1975. Alma Benvenuta Foa was the mother of Silvia's friends George and Joan Foa. The journal lists events from 1975-1978, but had been started in 1978 according to the seller's description written by daiad fine books.

Journal of Marguerite A. Lubi 1939-1940
Scope and Contents
A 130-paged journal kept by Marguerite A. Lubi (her mother was a Leverson) detailing a romantic affair during the early stages of WWI. It is unclear how this journal came to be a part of the archive.

Letters and Correspondence 1875-1959
Scope and Contents
This series contains materials such as letters, postcards, and related ephemeral items such as cut signatures and telegrams sent by and to members of the Thomas-Leverson family.

Album of letters sent to Brandon Thomas and Marguerite Thomas-Leverson 1875-1921
Scope and Contents
The scrapbook contains an assemblage of handwritten letters, postcards, cut signatures, autographed photos, and drawings, mostly addressed to Brandon Thomas. The letters come from an impressive array of senders such as W.S. Penley, Arthur Cecil, Edward George Saunders, Emil Sjägren, and Cyril Maude. A fragment of a letter from Florence Nightingale to E. A. Parkes is also pasted in, although the provenance behind these and the rest of the materials addressed to people other than Brandon Thomas are unknown. A few letters addressed to Marguerite Thomas-Leverson are found towards the end of the scrapbook.
General
Contains a 37x27x5 cm black leather-bound scrapbook with a gilded foredge and the letters "A.M.B.T" superimposed upon each other and embossed on the cover.
Box 5  
**Album of autograph letters 1900-1920**

Physical Description: Dark green letter album (24x27x5 cm) with gilt border, marbled endpaper, a metal clasp, and the letters "M. B. L." for (Marguerite Blanche Leverson) debossed on the cover.

Scope and Contents

Contains 47 autograph letters, mostly addressed to Amy Brandon Thomas. The materials date from 1900-1921, with a few letters from the late 1890s and 1930s-1950s. Also includes short handwritten letters, notes, telegrams, and cut signatures. Letters were written from an array of individuals in the English late 19th century performing scene, including such figures as Laurence Irving, Cyril Maude, Francis Edward James, Edward Rose, and Seymour Hicks.

Box 2, Folder 1  
**Album of letters written by Silvia 1919-1982**

Scope and Contents

A collection of letters bound into an album, most of them addressed to an individual named "Mad" and signed off affectionately by Silvia with the nickname "Loopy Lizz".

General

29 x 24 x 3 cm black letter album with a diamond shape debossed onto the front and back covers.

Box 2, Folder 2  
**Letters from Marguerite to Amy 1900-1909**

General

Folder contains twelve letters.

Box 2, Folder 3  
**Letters from Marguerite to Amy regarding Jimmy’s Injuries 1914**

Scope and Contents

Five letters sent to Amy by her mother while the latter was at the British Red Cross hospital in Paris visiting Jimmy, who had been critically injured on the French battlefront in the early stages of WWI. The letters were sent daily from November 7-11. Not long after, on November 17, Jimmy passed away due to his injuries.

Box 2, Folder 4  
**Letters from Jevan to Amy 1912, 1920**

Scope and Contents

Two letters from Jevan addressed to his sister Amy.

Box 2, Folder 5  
**Letters from Brandon and Jimmy Thomas to Amy 1903, 1908**

Scope and Contents

Letters to Amy Brandon Thomas, one each from her father (dated 1903) and her brother Jimmy (dated 1908).

Box 2, Folder 6  
**Letters from Silvia to Peggy 1950-1959**

Scope and Contents

5 pieces of correspondence written by Silvia Thomas to her cousin Peggy, three of them providing feedback for what seems to be a story or play written by the latter. The other two letters by Silvia discuss holiday plans and property hunting.
Letters and Correspondence 1875-1959

Box 2, Folder 7  
**Miscellaneous letters/correspondence 1911-1926, undated**

**Scope and Contents**
Four letters, two of them addressed to an individual identified as "Peggy" and two of them addressed to "Lily", presumably Lily Leerson, Marguerite's sister. One of the letters addressed to "Peggy" was written by her brother. The other is missing its latter pages with no information about the sender. One of the letters addressed to Lily was written by Marguerite inquiring about her wellbeing and thanking Lily for her letters. The other letter addressed to Lily is of a bittersweet and anguished tone, written from one who appears to have been a romantic interest. Also contains two postcards, one featuring a still of Aubrey Smith and Charles Hawtrey in the play "Inconstant George" on the front sent from Amy to her father. The other postcard is signed by Harold Williams and addressed to Lucy Lublin.

Photographs and Other Visual Materials

**Scope and Contents**
This series contains numerous photographic materials dating roughly from the 1850s to 1950s and that were produced via a variety of photographic methods - i.e. albumen prints and ambrotypes, among others). The collection is particularly rich in carte de visites and cabinet cards of various Thomas and Leerson family members and associates. The majority of the individuals and locales portrayed in the images are unidentified.

Box 1, Folder 1-8  
**Photographs of Thomas-Leerson family members & relatives c. 1880-1920**

**Scope and Contents**
A collection of eight folders containing photographs/cabinet cards of immediate and distant family members of Brandon Thomas and his wife Marguerite Leerson.
One folder with four cabinet card of Brandon Thomas and one b/w photo. Two of the cabinet cards feature Brandon Thomas in theatrical apparel and the other two feature him in formal clothing. In one of the theatrical cabinet cards, he is shown hugging Miss Winifred Emery during a scene in "Sowing the Wind"; the other shows Thomas wearing an outfit for his role in the "Cabinet Minister". Dates approximated to be around 1880-1900.
One folder with one photograph of Marguerite, two of Amy, three of Silvia, and five of Jevan. For Silvia, there are two photos of her as a young adult and one as a child. Three of Jevan's photographs are of him as a soldier in WWI, with one of him in his middle-age. One folder with three photographs of Marguerite's father James Leerson and one of his brother M. L. Leerson.
Two folders with twelve photographs of Marguerite's sister Lily, a young girl, and a toddler. It is possible that the young girl and the toddler are the same individual (based on photographic likeness) and that Lily is her/their mother.
One folder containing what might be eight photographs (mostly portraits) of Lily Leerson (based on contextual evidence from the other photographs) as a young woman. Also contains a single cabinet card of her as a teenager.
One folder with two photographs of Eugene Mayer, one of Amy Leerson, one of Carrie Morris (a cousin of Brandon Thomas), and three of Louis de Goldschmidt (relation of Marguerite's mother Henriette).
One folder of photographs featuring individuals that are unidentified but have a strong likelihood of belonging to Brandon-Leerson families based on contextual evidence and facial similarities. For example, one of the cabinet cards depicts an infant that is likely to be Amy Brandon Thomas, but the boy next to her is unidentified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 9-10</th>
<th>Thomas and Leverson families carte de visites 1850s-1910s</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>55 carte de visites featuring immediate and distant members of the Thomas and Leverson families. Some of them have identifying information on their back inscribed by, presumably, one of Brandon Thomas' children - likely Silvia. Some individual's featured include Marguerite Leverson, Henriette de Goldschmidt (Brandon Thomas' mother), Walter Thomas (father of Brandon Thomas), and Ada Leverson (Marguerite's sister-in-law).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 11</th>
<th>Unidentified photographs of people c. 1880-1973</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>Folder contains roughly 25 photographs featuring unidentified individuals. There is a possibility that some of the individuals depicted are part of the Thomas-Leverson family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 12</th>
<th>Photographic stills of stage plays c. 1900-1930</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>Around 40 photographs taken of what appears to be two different stage plays based on the stage attire. Some of the photos have notes inscribed on the back, but the relationship between the individuals depicted in the photos and the Thomas and Leverson families is unknown. One of the stage plays seems to be set in the Georgian era whereas the other one seems to have been set in more contemporary times (1880s).</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 13</th>
<th>Photographs of residences 1955, undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>2 photographs of residences, one unidentified and one of Madgehole Farm, a residence of Amy's.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 14</th>
<th>Pages from a scrapbook c. 1880-1900</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>5 large scrapbook sheets, each featuring a number of photos.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 5</th>
<th>Autograph book of photos 1919</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>Flyleaf of the autograph book contains a note addressed to Silvia, dated 1919. Photos depict various individuals in Silvia's childhood, including her father, friends, and ballet instructor Madame Zanfretta.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Box 7</th>
<th>Framed photos various</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>Includes: a 9.5x7 cm matted B/W photograph of Marguerite Leverson, a 8x6 cm portrait in a leather enclosure of James Thomas as a young adult [c. 1914], 7x9.5 cm wood-framed collodion photograph of Amy Thomas as a child [c. 1895]; 18x13 cm B/W photograph of Silvia Thomas taken in her office at the BBC; 18x14 cm albumen print of Henriette Leverson (nee de Goldschmidt), the mother of Marguerite Leverson .</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 2, Folder 8</th>
<th>Photograph negatives &amp; film wallets undated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Contents</td>
<td>Photographic negatives encased in sleeves. The original paper film wallets that enclosed the negatives are affixed to some of the negative sleeves. Most of the negatives appear to not have been developed - alternatively, such developed photos of a portion of the negatives cannot be found in the archive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 2, Folder 9

**Miscellaneous Items 1918, undated**

Scope and Contents
Folder includes one autographed photograph of Anglo-French actor and singer Maurice Farkoa addressed to Mr(s). Lublin, a watercolor sketch of a man's face in profile, an unidentified individual's dental x-ray dated 1918, and a number of empty film wallets and envelopes.