

Hingham Players Club Bicentennial Collection, c. 1915-1951

Repository: Hingham Public Library
Manuscript Number: MSC # 38
Creator: Hingham Players Club and John P. Richardson
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Extent: 1 Half Document Box, 2 Nonstandard Flat Boxes, 1 Oversize Folder
Access: Open for research.

Provenance

This collection was created by members of the Hingham Players Club between approximately 1915 and 1942. This is an artificial collection that was assembled by John Richardson in the mid-twentieth century. A portion of it was donated in 1974 and the remainder in 1981 as a part of the Bicentennial Collection.

Historical Note

The Hingham Players Club was founded in 1897 with the purpose of providing residents in Hingham the opportunity to publicly perform plays and skits. The Club also raised money for charity. It was composed of an executive committee, various temporary committees created to respond to specific issues, and active, honorary, and associate members.

Men and women wanting to formally participate in the club were required to apply for membership, with all candidates voted upon at the monthly and annual meetings. Membership was limited in number so in some years only a portion of the applicants were admitted. Those accepted were required to pay annual dues and were expected to be very active in the Club. This included not only acting in plays, but also working in stage crews, makeup and costume teams, and as lighting technicians.

It was the responsibility of the executive committee to decide which plays would be read and/or performed each season, the dates on which they would be presented, and which members would be asked to perform in them. They were also expected to lead all promotional activities, control ticket sales, and oversee Club finances. All of these subjects were discussed at closed executive committee meetings. They were also discussed at business meetings, which were also attended by regular members.

The Club held monthly meetings at the Old Ordinary on a regular basis in order to ensure that all members were up-to-date on Club activities as well as to address any issues or problems that had arisen. Members were asked to vote on these issues in order to determine how the Club should proceed. In many cases, after the meeting ended a play would be read by some of the Club's members. There was also an annual meeting which took place in either June or July of every year. It was during this meeting that officers were elected and a general overview of the coming season was announced.

Aside from meetings, the Club also held stand-alone readings and an annual play at the Old Ordinary. Unlike the readings, the play included costumes, sets, and elaborate decorations. The public was invited to purchase tickets in order to attend both the readings and the annual play, during which they were also offered food and drinks.

In the mid-1930s the Club began to face a crisis in activity and finances. Fewer members were regularly participating in Club activities, and many were not paying their annual dues. This was compounded by the fact that fewer tickets were being sold for public performances. This state of affairs resulted in extreme financial difficulties as well as fewer readings each season. During at least one year the Club was unable to fund an annual play. The executive committee brought these facts to the attention of the members on several occasions and also appointed a committee to provide suggestions for rejuvenating the Club.

Upon the request of the appointed committee, a new membership system was established, along with a permanent membership committee. Regular members were given the opportunity to choose which type of activities they conducted, rather than by assignment by the executive committee. Some members were also given the opportunity to decide which plays would be read and/or performed. By 1939 membership was increasing, and the Club was again profitable.

After the United States declared war against Japan and Germany in 1941 member activity decreased once again. The executive committee considered disbanding the Club, but ultimately decided to maintain it as an active organization but in a more informal manner. The readings would continue but there would be no elaborate productions. This strategy worked and the Club was still very active ten years later.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains the records of the Hingham Players Club between approximately 1915 and 1951. The bulk of the collection is composed of meeting minutes which between 1927 and 1951. They include information regarding business, monthly, executive, and annual gatherings as well as public readings and performances of plays. Administrative records include committee and officer reports, memoranda, letters, speeches, financial data, and notes which date between approximately 1929 and 1942. Finally, ephemeral items include performance programs, tickets, and advertisements for productions hosted by the Players Club between approximately 1915 and 1936.

Arrangement

This collection has been arranged into the following three series:

- Series I. Meeting Minutes, 1927-1951
- Series II. Administrative Records, c. 1929-1942
- Series III. Ephemera, c. 1915-1936

Series I. Meeting Minutes, 1927-1951
Box 1, Folder 1; Box 2

This series includes two ledgers and several loose-leaf papers containing typed and handwritten minutes for Club meetings between 1927 and 1942 as well as one meeting in 1951. The meetings described within these minutes include business, monthly, executive, and annual gatherings as well as public readings and performances of plays.

The entries include information regarding discussions and votes on such subjects as the financial status of the Club, changes to membership policies, officer appointments, creating new committees, promoting the Club and its plays, and considering whether or not to disband in the face of financial troubles and the advent of World War II. At the end of the first ledger there is also a complete list of active, honorary, and associate members which dates to approximately 1935.

Included within the two ledgers are such materials as treasurer and secretary reports, advertisements for plays and meetings, performance programs, and newspaper clippings. These materials relate to the meetings and performances discussed on the pages around them. The materials in this series are organized by date.

Series II. Administrative Records, c. 1929-1942
Box 1, Folder 2

This series is composed of letters, memoranda, handwritten notes, committee and officer reports, financial data, and speeches dating between approximately 1929 and 1942. These materials focus on a broad range of subjects, including the plays being performed by the Club, its income and expenditures, financial difficulties due to a lack of members paying dues and insufficient performance attendance, efforts to increase interest in the Club and its plays, and the effect of World War II on the Club and Hingham as a whole. The materials in this series are organized by date.

Series III. Ephemera, c. 1915-1936
Box 1, Folder 3; Flat File, Folder 1

This series contains performance programs, tickets, and advertisements for productions hosted by the Players Club between approximately 1915 and 1936. The majority of the materials are programs, which contain such information as the name of the play being performed, the location and date of the performance, the names of cast and staff members, an outline of the performance, and advertisements for local businesses.

There is also one ticket for a 1932 program held by the Hingham Players Club in cooperation with the Cohasset Dramatic Club and North River Players at Loring Hall. It includes such details as the date, location, and time of the performance as well as the cost of the ticket. Finally, there are three advertisements for performances that took place in unknown years. Information provided includes an overview of the performance, the staff and cast members involved, how to

purchase tickets, and the date of the performance. The materials in this series are organized by date.