

William E. Kline Hudson Playhouse Collection  
1912-1926

The Hudson Area Library History Room  
Hudson Area Library  
Hudson, New York

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**Collection Title:** William E. Kline Hudson Playhouse Collection, 1912-1926

**Collection ID:** A2023-001

**Creator:** William E. Kline

**Extent:** 1 box (1 linear feet)

**Dates:** 1912-1926

**Language:** The materials are in English.

**Scope and Content Note:**

**Content Warning:** *Some items in this collection refer to and/or depict images of minstrel shows. Performed in blackface, these shows were once common in the United States. They were a forerunner of vaudeville. They employed the racist stereotypes of that day as an integral part of their performance. The Hudson Area Library is a welcoming and inclusive space. The library, as an institution recognizes the difficult and upsetting history of racism in our country and our area that these minstrel images represent. At the same time, the library is dedicated to accommodating researchers' right to informed access. Our hope is that, in sharing this record and its context, we provide an accurate representation of the area's history, and spark scholarship and action for social justice.*

This collection, collected and donated by Hudson resident William E. Kline, documents the activities of The Playhouse in Hudson, NY during its heyday in the first quarter of the 20th century. The collection contains two scrapbooks and 42 programs from live performances (including dance, music, vaudeville, plays, and musicals) and movie screenings, dating from 1917 to 1926. Many of the programs represent shows put on by the Hudson Elks' Minstrels, who performed annually for some consecutive years. The scrapbooks also include ephemera related to the final years of World War I, such as a program for "Soldiers Homecoming Celebration" at The Playhouse on Sept 9, 1919, newspaper clippings, and a pamphlet explaining War-Savings Stamps from 1917.

**Historical Note:** The Playhouse opened in 1912 on the south side of Warren Street between 3rd and 4th Streets in Hudson, NY, as a moviehouse and live music and theater venue, bringing well-known performers, musicians, and shows to its live stage. The opening show at The Playhouse was the play "Everywoman: A Modern Morality Play" by Walter Browne. For several decades The Playhouse was the center of theatrical activity in Hudson, with the slogan, "The modern way to enjoy life, with a modern theatre to enjoy it in."

The following information was composed in 1981 by M. Hills, as told by Cornelia Ten Broeck, daughter of Frank Parker and Jeanette Rooney, niece of Hank Schiffer (a typed copy, with handwritten edits, of the document that this text comes from can be found in the City of Hudson Collection):

"In the 1890s, a local baseball team ran up a huge (at that time) debt of \$1,000 at the end of the season. Some of the young men were: Frank Parker, Hank Schiffer, Bernard Scovill, and Charles Traver. In an effort to pay off their debt, seven of the men decided to take advantage of the new 'movies.' They rented the auditorium in the old City Hall (Warren and City Hall Place) and showed 15 minute segments at 5 cents per person. They took turns running the machines and collecting the fees. Usually they had several

shows in an evening. The venture was so successful financially that they continued the project even after paying their debt. They added vaudeville to their programs as time went on. One group 'went broke' in Hudson and were stranded. Al Elliot and his wife were two of them. The group hired Elliot to help run their project.... When they finally lost use of the City Hall auditorium, they decided to try a larger building of their own. Elliot had theater contacts in New York City and could help them in getting varied live entertainment. They undertook to build the Playhouse for \$75,000 and hired Elliot as manager. He also played the piano. Besides movies, they were able to have tryouts here and a number of well-known stars played in live shows, although movies were their prime purpose. Financially the venture was successful and eventually it was sold to the Grossmans in New York City."

On the evening of February 25, 1938, a fire damaged The Playhouse irreparably and it was never reopened.

**Biographical Note:** William Elliot Kline was born in Hudson in 1903 and grew up at 438 East Allen Street. His father, Samuel Kline, owned the first shoe store in Hudson, Samuel Kline's Shoes, which was located at 553 Warren Street. William Kline eventually took over the store and worked there until he sold the building in 1972. For many years he also worked as the Secretary to the Chamber of Commerce in Hudson. He was a lover of literature, theater and music, and a member of the Hendrick Hudson Male Chorus. He died in Hudson in 1981.

**Repository:** The Hudson Area Library History Room

**Restrictions to Access:** The collection is open for research. Some items are fragile and may not be handled without staff supervision. The History Room is in the process of digitizing those items.

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**Preferred Citation:** William E. Kline Hudson Playhouse Collection, Hudson Area Library, Hudson NY.

**Processing Information:** The collection was processed in January 2023 by Nina Boutsikaris.

**Acquisition information:** The collection was donated by William E. Kline, a Hudson resident who lived at 438 Allen Street during the period that The Playhouse was open. In 1934 Kline was listed as an official in the Hudson Chamber of Commerce.

**Related Materials:** The City of Hudson Collection at the Hudson Area Library History Room contains further materials related to The Playhouse.

**Subjects:**

Theater—United States

Vaudeville—United States

Musical Theater

Performing Arts—United States

Minstrel Shows

Elks (Fraternal Order)

Theaters—New York (State)

**Names:**

Kline, William E., 1903-1981

**Forms:**

Scrapbooks

Theater Programs

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged into two series by format and date.

1. Playhouse Scrapbooks, 1917-1921.

This series contains two scrapbooks that document the activities of The Playhouse. The scrapbooks are very fragile and cannot be handled without staff supervision.

2. Playhouse Programs, 1912-1926.

This series contains 43 programs from performances, screenings, and events at The Playhouse.

**Container List**

**Playhouse Scrapbooks, 1917-1921**

Box 1 - Scrapbook "Hudson Playhouse," 1917-1920

Box 1 - Scrapbook "Hudson Playhouse, Ex Libris W.E Kline," 1920-1921

**Playhouse Programs, 1912-1926**

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Everywoman," March 25, 1912 (2 copies)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Lew Dockstader," March 27, 1912

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Within the Law," January 8, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Dressler's Players," February 21, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Value Received," March 4, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Love Tales of Hoffman," March 10, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Merchant of Venice," March 31, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Girl of My Dreams," April 7, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Fortune Hunter," April 12, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Within the Law," May 3, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "First Annual Elks' Minstrels," May 15, 16, 1913 (2 copies)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Real Thing," May 23, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Rose Maid," May 29, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Co-Respondent," May 31, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Firefly," Sept. 23, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "When Love is Young," Oct 6, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Sousa and his Band," Oct. 16, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Rob Roy," Oct. 23, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "A Double Deceiver," October 31, 1913

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Old Reliable," Jan. 7, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Too Many Cooks," Jan. 30, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Jim's Marriage," February 20, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Taming of the Shrew," February 28, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "She Stoops to Conquer," March 7, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh," March 13, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Doll Girl," April 13, 1914

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Second Annual Elks' Minstrels," May 5, 6, 1914 (2 copies)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Third Annual Elks' Minstrels," May 4, 5, 1915

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Fourth Annual Elks' Minstrels," May 1, 2, 1916

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Second Annual Dance Recital," June 16, 1920

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Second Annual Vaudeville and Motion Picture Show, November 13, 1922

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Legion Black and White Revue," 1925

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Legion Black and White Minstrel Revue of 1926"

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Excuse Me," April 8 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "The Chocolate Soldier", April 22 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Madame Sherry," April 13 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Everywoman," December 5 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Egypt," September 18 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Carnival," December 10 (no year, early 20th century)

Box 1 - Folder 1 - "Naughty Marietta," April 24 (no year, early 20th century)