Collection Summary

Title: Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn Papers

Span Dates: 1880-1994

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1910-1992)

ID No.: MSS85409

Creator: Severn, Elizabeth

Creator: Severn, Margaret

Extent: 5,600 items; 16 containers plus 1 oversize; 209 digital files (6.34 GB); 6.8 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: Elizabeth Severn, psychotherapist, author, and psychoanalytic patient of Sándor Ferenczi; and her daughter, Margaret Severn, ballet dancer and vaudeville performer. Correspondence, writings, printed matter, and photographs concerning Elizabeth Severn's private life and her career as a psychotherapist. Correspondence, writings, art work, printed matter, photographs, and digital files relating to Margaret Severn's life as a dancer in New York theaters, in traveling vaudeville shows in the 1920s, and with European ballet companies in the 1930s.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People
Albertieri, Luigi.
Armstrong, Harriet Mann, 1856-1956--Correspondence.
Beebe, William, 1877-1962--Correspondence.
De Mille, Agnes.
Federn, Paul.
Ferenczi, Gizella, 1866-1949.
Ferenczi, Sándor, 1873-1933.
Fokine, Michel, 1880-1942.
Gygi, Ota.
Iskoldoff, Eugene 1892-1957.
Nijinska, Bronislava, 1891-1972.
Nijinska, Bronislava, 1891-1972.
Severn family.
Severn, Elizabeth.
Severn, Margaret. Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn papers. 1880-1993.
Sparling, H. Halliday (Henry Halliday)--Correspondence.
St. Denis, Ruth, 1880-1968.
Steinert, Alexander, 1900-1982.
Waelder, Robert.

Organizations
American Field Service.
Ballets russes.
Dancers' Club (New York, N.Y.)

Subjects
Abortion.
Ballet companies--Europe.
Ballet dancers--Europe.
Ballet--Europe.
Ballet.
Choreographers.
Dance--Europe.
Dance--New York (State)--New York.
Dance.
Dancers--New York (State)--New York--Societies and clubs.
Dancers.
Impresarios.
Masks.
Music-halls (Variety-theaters, cabarets, etc.)
Musicals--New York (State)--New York.
Musicians.
Off-Broadway theater.
Psychoanalysis.
Psychotherapy.
Revues.
Theater--New York (State)--New York.
Vaudeville.
World War, 1939-1945.

Places
Germany--History--1945-1955.

Titles
Elizabeth Severn papers
Margaret Severn papers

Occupations
Analysands.
Authors.
Ballet dancers.
Psychotherapists.
Vaudeville performers.

Administrative Information

Provenance
The papers of Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn, psychotherapist and psychoanalytic patient of Sándor Ferenczi and her daughter, ballet dancer and vaudeville performer, were given to the Library of Congress by Arnold Rachman in 2008 and 2016.

Processing History
The collection was first processed and described in 2013 as the papers of Elizabeth Severn. The addition to the papers was processed and described in 2018 and the name of the collection changed at that time to the papers of Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn.

Transfers
Some photographs have been transferred to the Library’s Prints and Photographs Division and a video tape was transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as part of the Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn Papers.
Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Digital Format

Digital files were received as part of the papers of Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn. Reference copies were created from the original digital media. Advanced notice is required for access to digital content; consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division for more information.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or Digital ID number, Elizabeth Severn and Margaret Severn Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note for Elizabeth Severn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879, Nov. 17</td>
<td>Born Leota Brown, Milwaukee, Wisc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circa 1900</td>
<td>Married Charles Kenneth Heywood (separated 1905)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Gave birth to daughter, Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-1907</td>
<td>After history of mental and emotional illness, treated for nervous breakdown by a medical doctor using &quot;power of positive thinking&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Determined to become a mental healer, she obtained a divorce, changed her name to Elizabeth Severn, and with her daughter moved to Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circa 1908-1912</td>
<td>&quot;Metaphysician and healer,&quot; traveled in the United States, including Colorado, Nebraska, Texas, and Washington, D.C., seeing patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1914</td>
<td>Moved to England, started a psychotherapy practice in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Published <em>Psycho-Therapy: Its Doctrine and Practice</em>. London: Rider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1924</td>
<td>Returned to the United States and established psychotherapy practice in New York City; was increasingly troubled herself and sought help from several psychiatrists, without cure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Published <em>The Psychology of Behavior</em>. New York: Dodd, Mead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Traveled to Budapest, Hungary, to undergo analysis with Sándor Ferenczi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>Analysand of Sándor Ferenczi; traveled frequently between Europe and New York for analysis while continuing her own practices in New York City and London, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Death of Sándor Ferenczi; Severn resumed her psychotherapy practice in London, England</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1933 Published The Discovery of the Self. London: Rider

1933-1939 Traveled between London, England, and New York City; gave lectures and taught courses on psychology while continuing to see patients

1939-1959 With the advent of World War II, moved permanently to New York City; continued to write, lecture, and see patients

1959, Feb. Died, New York, N.Y.


Biographical Note for Margaret Severn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901, Aug. 14</td>
<td>Born Margaret Heywood, Birmingham, Ala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>First dance performance, Denver, Colo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1914</td>
<td>Lived in London, England, with her mother; studied dance with Eduord Espinosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Moved to New York City, ballet student of Luigi Albertieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Summer student of Ruth St. Denis and performer with the Denishawn School of Dancing, Los Angeles, Calif.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916-1931</td>
<td>Professional dancer in a variety of cabarets, theater revues, and traveling vaudeville companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Performer in the Greenwich Village Follies dancing with masks made by artist Wladyslaw T. Benda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1925</td>
<td>While traveling on the vaudeville circuit, became intimately involved with Hungarian violinist Ota Gygi who also became her manager; had abortion in April of 1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Traveled to Budapest to visit mother; had several sessions with psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi; relationship with Gygi ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-1928</td>
<td>Returned to U.S.; dancer with traveling company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-1932</td>
<td>Dancer and dance teacher, New York City; involved with a variety of productions, concerts, and recitals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Opened the Dancers' Club, New York, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Moved to Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Ballet dancer with company of Bronislava Nijinska</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1934  Dancer with Ida Rubinstein’s ballet company working with choreographers Michel Fokine and Kurt Jooss

1935-1937  Principle dancer, Ballet Russes de Paris; toured throughout Europe

1937  Moved from Paris to Prague, Czechoslovakia, with Vassili [unknown surname], a Russian journalist

1938  Returned to Paris, moved to London; miscellaneous dance engagements

1939  Returned to New York City to live with her mother; continued to perform and teach dance

1971  Moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

1997, July 7  Died, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Elizabeth Severn (1879-1959) and Margaret Severn (1901-1997) span the years 1880-1994, with the bulk of the material dating from 1910 to 1992. The collection is in two parts. The part processed in 2013 is focused on Elizabeth Severn's activities as a psychotherapist. The 2018 addition consists primarily of material related to dancer Margaret Severn, Elizabeth Severn's daughter. The collection contains correspondence, writings, photographs, printed matter, sketches, and digital files consisting of two video documentaries, edited correspondence, and draft writings. The digital files are related to Margaret Severn.

In the first part of the collection, focused on Elizabeth Severn, the correspondence is almost entirely incoming letters, mostly from patients of Severn. There are also some carbon copy letters written by World War II American Field Service volunteers giving descriptions of wartime activities and postwar Germany. Other correspondents include William Beebe and H. Halliday Sparling. Also of interest are the notes made during lectures and seminars by Paul Federn and Robert Waelder. Although Elizabeth Severn and her daughter Margaret maintained a long correspondence, Elizabeth Severn's portion is not represented. Margaret, reportedly, in accordance with her mother's wishes, burned her mother's letters in 1986. Elizabeth Severn's speeches and writings files include drafts of three unpublished books as well as a set of typescript essays and speeches. The printed matter includes publicity material for Elizabeth Severn's psychotherapist career. The leaflets and cards advertise her lectures or her availability for therapy sessions and document her travels. Newspaper clippings concern Severn lecture appearances, news about psychoanalysis, and clippings of people who were close acquaintances or patients of Severn. Reference copies of some photographs transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division, including those with substantial writing on the back, have been kept with the papers. Photographs include travel pictures, snapshots, and portraits of Elizabeth Severn, as well as photographs of friends, family, and patients, including a group of photographs of Severn with her analyst Sándor Ferenczi and his wife, Gizella Ferenczi.

The 2018 addition is substantially larger than the original collection. Material concerning Elizabeth Severn in the addition includes addressed envelopes tracking her travels and residency changes from 1907 to 1935, received correspondence, writings, and miscellaneous documents and printed matter. The bulk of the 2018 addition consists of family correspondence: Margaret Severn's letters to her mother and grandmother (Amma). In her responses to her mother's letters, information can be gleaned about Elizabeth Severn's activities, travels, opinions, and her ongoing psychoanalytic relationship with Sándor Ferenczi.

Margaret's letters to her mother and grandmother provide a detailed description of her dance career and her personal life from 1919 to 1939. She often wrote daily letters and was surprisingly frank with her mother concerning all aspects of her life including sexual activity. Margaret Severn performed at the highest professional level of the dance world in the United States and Europe. Trained as a ballet dancer when there were no ballet companies in the United States, she spent years performing in vaudeville, cabarets, and in the New York theater. In 1932 she moved to Paris and danced ballet in a professional world dominated by Russian émigrés. Over the years, she danced with many of the top dancers and...
choreographers of her time, and her letters provide an inside view of the world of dance from 1920 to 1939. Dancers, choreographers, musicians, and impresarios who worked with Margaret Severn, often appearing multiple times over the years, and who figure in her letters are many but include the following: Luigi Albertieri, Agnes De Mille, Michel Fokine, Ota Gygi, Eugene Iskoldoff, Kurt Jooss, Bronislava Nijinska, Ida Rubinstein, Ruth St. Denis, and Alexander Steinert. An abortion in April 1925, fully described in the letters, was the result of her 1924-1925 affair with Hungarian violinist and fellow vaudeville performer, Ota Gygi.

Margaret Severn had her first major critical acclaim in 1920 when she performed in the Greenwich Village Follies using masks created by artist Wladyslaw T. Benda. After the success this performance, Benda taught Severn how to make her own masks for dance performances. Her mask dances remained a signature performance piece throughout her dance career. Two small masks of Margaret Severn are in the collection. In addition to an active performance schedule, Severn opened the Dancers' Club at 347 W. 56th Street in Manhattan (1930-1932). The club provided living accommodations, mail and laundry services, practice facilities, an employment register, and social activities for professional dancers, teachers, and students. Margaret sometimes included newsletters from the club with her correspondence to her mother. In 1932, Margaret traveled to Budapest to visit her mother and subsequently settled in Paris. She danced with Bronislava Nijinska's ballet company in 1932 and with Ida Rubinstein's company for the 1934 Paris Opera House production that included the premiere of Stravinsky's *Perséphone*. Her letters to her mother provide lively backstage descriptions of rehearsals and performances. Margaret Severn performed as principal dancer and ballet master for a traveling company called the Ballet Russes de Paris, 1935-1937. The company participated, with Margaret Severn as lead dancer, in the July 1936 outdoor spectacle in Nymphenburg Park, Munich, Germany, called "Nacht der Amazonen" (Night of the Amazons). For the performance, Severn was kidnapped by horseback-riding Cossacks and later saved by Amazons (played by German women) on horseback. "Nacht der Amazonen" was an annual event, 1936-1939.

The letters have many editorial marks, usually in green ink, that were made years later when Margaret Severn was working on her memoir. Envelopes have been inscribed with notes about the contents of the letter. The original writing in the letters and on the envelopes, however, is still legible even with the edits. Although she never completed her memoir, she did publish three articles in *Dance Chronicle* based on parts of her correspondence. The articles are in the autobiographical writings file. The digital files include her draft memoir and typed and edited transcriptions of many of the letters, including early letters for which the original paper copy is not in the collection. Presumably, the transcriptions of these early letters are edited versions. Margaret Severn was also an artist. In addition to a folder of her sketches, many of her letters are illustrated.

Peter Lipski's two film documentaries on Margaret Severn, *Dance Masks: The World of Margaret Severn* (1980) and *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Woman* (1992) are both available as digital files.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged in two sections: the original collection of Elizabeth Severn papers that was processed in 2013 and an addition processed in 2018 that includes some Elizabeth Severn material but is predominantly composed of the papers of Margaret Severn. Within each section, the files are arranged alphabetically by name of person or type of material and alphabetically or chronologically therein.
## Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Beebe, William, 1934</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>General</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Received, 1913-1956, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Sent, 1943, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>World War II American Field Service volunteers, received and sent, 1943-1945</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Drawings of Elizabeth Severn by Margaret Severn (daughter), 1921, 1935-1938</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Federn, Paul, lecture notes and writings, 1949-1950, undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Miscellany, 1928-1959, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Photographs, circa 1880-circa 1955</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Printed matter</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Miscellaneous, 1911, 1936-1954, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>News clippings, 1937-1959, 1986-1989</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Severn publicity material, circa 1910-1938</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>&quot;Private library of Elizabeth Severn,&quot; 1949-1954, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Severn, Margaret, 1939-1942, 1960, 1978-1993, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Sparling, H. Halliday, 1918, 1924, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Speeches and writings</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Book drafts</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>&quot;65 Degrees of Psychological and Mental Healing,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>&quot;An Analysis of Love and Sex,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>&quot;Crystals, a novel,&quot; circa 1922</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>&quot;Crystals, a novel,&quot; circa 1922</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Books published</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>The Discovery of the Self, 1933</td>
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<td>Psycho-Therapy: Its Doctrine and Practice, 1914</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Essay drafts</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Difference Between Mental and Spiritual Healing,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;For the Development of Wisdom,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Magnetic Healing,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Some Important Points in Regard to Magnetism,&quot; undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Spiritual Healing,&quot; undated</td>
</tr>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Worry: Its Cause and Cure,&quot; undated</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Speeches to Practical Psychology Club</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;Mental Catharsis: A Means of Cure,&quot; 23 Nov. 1937</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>&quot;What is Psychic Injury?,&quot; 16 Nov. 1937</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Thompson, Clara, &quot;Ferenczi's Contribution to Psychoanalysis,&quot; 1944</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Waelder, Robert, seminar notes, 1950-1951</td>
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<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>Addition</td>
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<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>Elizabeth Severn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>Addressed envelopes, 1907-1935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| BOX 4     | Correspondence received, 1914, 1936-1948  
(2 folders) |
| BOX 4     | Ferenczi, Sándor, 1933, 1961, undated |
| BOX 4     | Miscellany, 1934-1938, 1967, undated |
| BOX 4     | Passports and identity cards, 1930-1935 |
| BOX 4     | Photographs, undated |
| BOX 4     | Printed matter, 1905, 1934-1958, undated  
(2 folders) |
| BOX 4     | Writings |
| BOX 4     | Book draft, "The Psychology of Love," undated  
(2 folders) |
| BOX 4     | Miscellaneous, 1914, 1933, undated |
| BOX 5     | The Psychology of Behavior, 1920-1925 |
| BOX 5     | Psycho-Therapy: Its Doctrine and Practice, 1913 |
| BOX 5     | Margaret Severn |
| BOX 5     | Autobiographical writings |
| BOX 5     | Dance Chronicle journal articles, 1988-1993  
(2 folders) |
| DF        | Digital Files: Edited correspondence and draft memoir, 1979, 1987  
Correspondence: 1919; memoir, chapters 1-5: 1901-1917  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_001  
Correspondence: 1919-1922; memoir, chapter 6: 1920  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_002  
Memoir, chapter 7: 1922-1923  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_003  
Memoir, chapter 7: 1923-1924  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_004  
Correspondence: 1924-1925  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_005  
Correspondence: 1925-1927; memoir: Feb. 1927  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_006  
Correspondence: 1928-1929  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_007  
Correspondence: 1929-1930; memoir, chapter 8: 1929  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_008  
Correspondence: 1930-1931; memoir, chapter 8: 1930-1931  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_009  
Correspondence: 1931-1932; memoir: 1932  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_010  
Correspondence: 1932-1933; memoir, chapter 9: 1932  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_011  
Correspondence: 1933-1934; memoir, chapters 10-11: 1933-1934  
Digital ID: mss85982_128_012 |
Correspondence: 1934-1936
Digital ID: mss85982_128_013
Correspondence: 1936-1939; memoir, chapters 12-13: 1936-1939
Digital ID: mss85982_128_014

BOX 5
"The Sixth Sense," undated
BOX 5
Dance costume and photograph, undated
BOX 6
Family correspondence
BOX 6
Aug. 1919-Sept. 1922
(12 folders)
BOX 7
Oct. 1922-Oct. 1923
(12 folders)
BOX 8
Nov. 1923-Feb. 1925
(13 folders)
BOX 9
Mar. 1925-Apr. 1927
(15 folders)
BOX 10
May 1927-June 1928
(14 folders)
BOX 11
July 1928-Sept. 1929
(14 folders)
BOX 12
Oct. 1929-Jan. 1931
(14 folders)
BOX 13
Feb. 1931-Dec. 1932
(13 folders)
BOX 14
Jan. 1933-Mar. 1935
(16 folders)
BOX 15
Apr. 1935-May 1937
(17 folders)
BOX 16
June 1937-Mar. 1939, undated
(8 folders)
BOX 16
General correspondence, 1921-1928, 1983-1994, undated
(3 folders)
BOX 16
Lecture notes on dance history, undated
(2 folders)
BOX 16
Lipskis, Peter, film documentaries Dance Masks: The World of Margaret Severn (1980) and Portrait of an Artist as a Young Woman (1992)

DF
Video files, 2011
Digital ID: mss85409_127_001

BOX 16
Promotional material, circa 1980, circa 1992
BOX OV 1
Masks, undated
BOX 16
BOX 16
News clippings, 1928-1931, undated
BOX 16
Passport and vital records, 1928, 1959, 1966
BOX 16
BOX 16
Sketches by Margaret Severn, 1923, 1945, 1994, undated