

John Thompson Ford Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

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Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff

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Collection Summary

Title: John Thompson Ford Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1809-1960

Bulk Dates: 1850-1894

ID No.: MSS61995

Creator: Ford, John Thompson, 1829-1894

Extent: 5,000 items

Extent: 22 containers plus 12 oversize

Extent: 15.2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm87061995>

Summary: Theater executive and dramatist. Correspondence, playbooks, playbills, subject files, scrapbooks, and other papers relating to Ford's life and work as a theater manager in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., in the last half of the nineteenth century, including the assassination by John Wilkes Booth of President Abraham Lincoln at his theater in Washington.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Booth, Edwin, 1833-1893--Correspondence.

Booth, John Wilkes, 1838-1865.

Ford, Annie. Annie E. Ford papers.

Ford, John Thompson, 1829-1894.

Ford, Lizzie. Lizzie Ford papers.

Forrest, Edwin, 1806-1872--Correspondence.

Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), 1836-1911.

Jefferson, Joseph, 1829-1905--Correspondence.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Assassination.

Sullivan, Arthur, 1842-1900.

Tayleure, Clifton W., -1891--Correspondence.

Winter, William, 1836-1917--Correspondence.

Organizations

Ford's Theatre (Washington, D.C.)

Grand Opera House (Baltimore, Md.)

Holliday Street Theatre (Baltimore, Md.)

Subjects

Charities.

Theater--United States.

Theaters--Alexandria--Richmond.

Theaters--Maryland--Baltimore.

Theaters--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Theaters--South Carolina--Charleston.

Theaters--Virginia--Richmond.

Theaters--Washington (D.C.)

Places

Baltimore (Md.)--Politics and government.

Occupations

Dramatists.
Executives.

Acquisition Information

The papers of John Thompson Ford, theater executive and dramatist, were given to the Library of Congress by Stanley W. McClure in 1960 and John F. Sollers in 1986. Additional material was received from Sollers between 1988 and 1998.

Processing History

The papers of John Thompson Ford were arranged and described in 1986. Additional items were placed in the collection in 1992. The collection was partially reprocessed and expanded in 2011 by Laura J. Kells. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

Transfers

Some photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Thompson Ford is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of John Thompson Ford 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.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, John Thompson Ford Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1829, Apr. 16	Born, Baltimore, Md.
1849	Married Edith Branch Andrews
1851-1854	Agent for the Nightingale Serenaders, a minstrel troupe Correspondent for the <i>Baltimore Clipper</i>
1854-1855	Formed a partnership with George Kunkel and Thomas Moxley in leasing the Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md.
1856-1861	In partnership with George Kunkel and Thomas Moxley, managed Marshall Theatre, Richmond, Va.
1858	Elected to First Branch City Council from the fourteenth district, Baltimore, Md.
circa 1861	Became sole manager of the Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md.
1862	Built Ford's Athenaeum, Washington, D.C.

1863	After Ford's Athenaeum burned down, rebuilt it as Ford's New Theatre (later called Ford's Theatre), Washington, D.C.
1865	Incarcerated from April 18-May 27, following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C.
1867	Ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Baltimore, Md.
1870	Purchased the Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md. Managed Academy of Music, Charleston, S.C. Elected to Second Branch City Council from the nineteenth and twentieth district, Baltimore, Md.
1871	Built Ford's Grand Opera House, Baltimore, Md.
1874	Elected to First Branch City Council from the nineteenth district, Baltimore, Md.
1878	Managed Broad Street Theatre, Philadelphia, Pa.
1894, Mar. 15	Died, Baltimore, Md.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John Thompson Ford (1829-1894) document his career as a theater manager. Ford is best known as the owner of the Washington, D.C., theater where President Abraham Lincoln was shot in April 1865, but he managed theaters in Baltimore, Maryland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Charleston, South Carolina; Alexandria, Virginia; Richmond, Virginia; and Washington, D.C., in the last half of the nineteenth century. He also managed traveling and resident acting companies. His papers are arranged into the following series: [General Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Writings](#), [Playbooks](#), [Playbills](#), [Scrapbooks](#), [Addition](#), and [Oversize](#). The collection spans the period 1809-1960, with the bulk of the material from 1850 to 1894.

The [General Correspondence](#) covers the period 1832-1894 and includes letters from notable theatrical personalities such as Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest, Joseph Jefferson, Clifton W. Tayleure, and William Winter. These letters, as well as those written by Ford's friends and business associates, reflect the influence Ford had on the theater during this period. Copies of letters from Ford, some from other manuscript repositories, are included. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln by the actor John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre, the subsequent arrest of Ford and his brothers, and the closure of the theater are related in the correspondence. Ford's civic activities, particularly in Baltimore, are also documented.

A large portion of the [Subject File](#) consists of unbound scrapbook pages documenting productions at the Holliday Street Theatre and Ford's Grand Opera House in Baltimore, his charitable activities, and management of Gilbert and Sullivan productions. Included also is biographical and genealogical information.

The [Writings File](#) contains writings and notes by Ford and plays written by his daughters, Annie E. Ford and Lizzie Ford. Among John Thompson Ford's writings are handwritten transcriptions of his letters to the *Baltimore Clipper* during the period he was on tour with the Nightingale Serenaders minstrel troupe, letters to the editor on theatrical topics, and an account of his belief in the innocence of Mary E. Surratt of the charge of being a conspirator in the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

A [Playbooks](#) series is comprised of playbooks for productions staged at theaters managed by Ford. They include one-act farces, full-length comedies, and dramas. Such books were bought by patrons at the theater and contained the entire script of the play by character. They were helpful in following the play and also were kept as souvenirs. A few of the playbooks contain annotations.

A series of [Playbills](#) spanning 1856-1881 contains theater programs and broadsides for productions at theaters Ford managed in Washington and Baltimore. Arranged chronologically under the name of the theater, it provides details such as names of performers and theater managers, dates of performances, and the cost of admission.

The [Scrapbooks](#) series is comprised of seven volumes compiled by Ford's daughter, Lizzie Ford. They contain mainly newspaper clippings, but include programs, notes, menus, and other memorabilia. Focusing on theatrical topics, her father's career and interests, and productions and benefits at Ford's theaters, they also chronicle events in Baltimore.

An [Addition](#) to the papers contains family correspondence between members of Ford's extended family, a ledger, 1869-1870, of a theatrical company in Charleston, S.C., that was also used as a scrapbook about his Baltimore theaters in the years 1875-1879, a copy of a diagram depicting John Wilkes Booth's escape from Ford's Theatre, and copies of

autograph books containing entries by prominent theatrical figures of the nineteenth century. An incomplete biography written by Ford's grandson, John Ford Sollers, covers Ford's early years, the Lincoln assassination, and Ford's struggles to retain his theater following that event.

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in eight series:

- [General Correspondence, 1832-1894](#)
- [Subject File, 1852-1956](#)
- [Writings, 1852-1894](#)
- [Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890](#)
- [Playbills, 1856-1881](#)
- [Scrapbooks, 1846-1923](#)
- [Addition, 1849-1960](#)
- [Oversize, 1856-1893](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-2	<p><u>General Correspondence, 1832-1894</u></p> <p>Letters to Ford from actors and managers, friends and family members, and some letters sent by Ford. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 3-4	<p><u>Subject File, 1852-1956</u></p> <p>Newspaper clippings, contracts, printed matter, notes, and other documents. Arranged alphabetically by subject.</p>
BOX 5	<p><u>Writings, 1852-1894</u></p> <p>Writings primarily by Ford and his daughters, Annie E. Ford and Lizzie Ford. Arranged alphabetically by name of author.</p>
BOX 6-14	<p><u>Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890</u></p> <p>Theatre playbooks. Arranged alphabetically by title.</p>
BOX 15-17	<p><u>Playbills, 1856-1881</u></p> <p>Theater programs and broadsides. Arranged chronologically under the name of the theater.</p>
BOX 18-21	<p><u>Scrapbooks, 1846-1923</u></p> <p>Lizzie Ford's scrapbooks. Arranged according to the numbers assigned to six of the volumes by Lizzie Ford, followed by a seventh unnumbered volume. Scrapbooks are accompanied by folders of loose material that had been inserted in the volumes.</p>
BOX 21-22	<p><u>Addition, 1849-1960</u></p> <p>Family correspondence, ledger, photocopies of autographs books, incomplete typescript biography of John Thompson Ford, a list of plays, printed matter, and other documents. Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material.</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 12	<p><u>Oversize, 1856-1893</u></p> <p>Programs, broadsides, and a theater seating plan. Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-2	General Correspondence, 1832-1894 Letters to Ford from actors and managers, friends and family members, and some letters sent by Ford. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	1832, 1856-1879 (13 folders)
BOX 2	1880-1894 (11 folders) Undated
BOX 3-4	Subject File, 1852-1956 Newspaper clippings, contracts, printed matter, notes, and other documents. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 3	Actors, 1878-1920, 1927 Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 1878-1956 Baltimore, Md., 1875-1923 (2 folders) Benefits, 1876-1893, 1906 (2 folders) Biographical material, 1878-1893, 1912, undated (2 folders) Charities, 1869, 1876-1893 Church and stage, 1875-1879, 1893 Clarke, Creston <i>See Container 4, Ford, Martha and Creston Clarke</i> Contracts, 1874 Copyright issues <i>The Mikado</i> , 1885 Miscellaneous, 1878-1881 Ford, Annie E., 1871-1877
BOX 4	Ford, Elias, 1852-1853, 1876 Ford, Martha and Creston Clarke, 1887-1895, 1910 Ford family genealogy, 1884-1948 Ford's Grand Opera House, Baltimore, Md. Ground rent suit, 1871-1894 Miscellany, 1873-1894, 1902, 1920-1948, 1964 (2 folders) Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., 1863-1865, 1893, 1930, 1951 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> , 1878-1879 Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md., 1860-1880, 1902, 1917, 1949 (2 folders) Managers versus critics, laws, and unions, 1876-1917

Subject File, 1852-1956

Container

Contents

	Minstrels, 1853-1855, 1888, 1895, 1902, 1909, 1918, 1946
	Miscellaneous topics, 1874-1895, undated (2 folders)
BOX 5	Obituaries, 1894-1895, 1914, 1921
	Reminiscences and interviews, 1870-1915
	Washington, D.C., theaters, 1862-1886, 1912, 1943
BOX 5	Writings, 1852-1894
	Writings primarily by Ford and his daughters, Annie E. Ford and Lizzie Ford. Arranged alphabetically by name of author.
BOX 5	Ford, Annie E., undated (2 folders)
	Ford, John Thompson, 1852, 1876-1894
	Ford, Lizzie, 1892, undated (3 folders)
	Others, undated
BOX 6-14	Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890
	Theatre playbooks. Arranged alphabetically by title.
BOX 6	<i>The Adopted Child</i>
	<i>Adrienne</i>
	<i>An Alarming Sacrifice</i>
	<i>Aline</i>
	<i>Ambrose Gwinett</i>
	<i>An Ample Apology</i>
	<i>Angelo</i>
	<i>Anthony and Cleopatra</i>
	<i>The Apostate</i>
	<i>Apple Blossoms</i>
	<i>The Area Belle</i>
	<i>Armand</i>
	<i>L'Article 47</i>
	<i>As You Like It</i>
	<i>Aunt Charlotte's Maid</i>
	<i>Avenger</i>
	<i>Babes in the Woods</i>
	<i>Bamboozling</i>
	<i>Bardell v. Picwick</i>
	<i>Beau Brummell</i>
	<i>Beaux's Stratagem</i>
	<i>Beauty and The Beast</i>
	<i>Behind Time</i>
	<i>The Bell Ringer of St. Paul's</i>
	<i>The Belle's Stratagem</i>

Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890

Container

Contents

BOX 7

Belphegor
Ben Bolt
Ben the Boatswain
Betsey Baker
Billy Taylor
Black Ey'd William
Black Sheep
The Blind Boy
Blow for Blow
A Bold Stroke for a Husband
A Bold Stroke for a Wife
Boots at the Swan
Bowl'd Out
Box and Cox
The Boy Martyrs
The Bravo
Breach of Promise
The Bridal
The Bride of Lammermoor
Brigand
The Broken-Hearted Club
The Brothers
Bruised and Cured
The Busy Body
Camille
Captain Kyd
Captain's Not A-Miss
Cabman No. 93`
Carte De Visite
Castle Spectre
Cataract of the Ganges
Caught in a Line
The Charcoal Burner
Cheap Excursion
The Child of Nature
Chops of the Channel
Clari
Clouds
Columbus el Filibustero!!
Comfortable Service
Confounded Foreigners
Comical Countess
The Conscript
Country Squire
Crossing the Line
A Cup of Tea

BOX 8

Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890

Container

Contents

BOX 9

Cupboard Love
Cupid's Eye-Glass
Cure for the Heartache
Der Freischutz
Doing for the Best
Fair Maid of Perth
False Pretences
A Family Failing
Family Jars
Family Pride
Fashion
Fashion and Feeling
Fatal Marriage
Father and Son
Faust and Marguerite
The Fellow That Likes Me
The Female Detective
Fernande
Feudal Times
The Field of Forty Footsteps
Fifth Wheel
The Fire Raiser
The Fireman
First Love
Fitzsmythe of Fitzsmythe Hall
Flies in the Web
Floating Beacon
The Flying Dutchman
Fontainebleau
The Fool's Revenge
Forest Keeper
The Forest Rose
Fortunes Frolic
Fortunio and the Seven Gifted Servants
Forty and Fifty
Found in a 4-Wheeler
Founded of Facts
Fountain of Beauty
Fra Diavolo
French Exhibition
French Spy
Gambler's Fate
The Game of Life
The Game of Love
The Gamester
Gen. Grant

Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890

Container

Contents

BOX 10

The Gentle Shepherd
George Barnwell
Gertrude's Money Box
Giralda
Glance at New York
Glory of Columbia
Go to Putney
Going to the Dogs
A Golden Fetter
Goose with the Golden Eggs
Grandfather Whitehead
Green Mountain Boy
Grimsham, Bagshaw, and Bradshaw
The Gun-Maker of Moscow
Gustavus the Third
A Hard Case
The Hidden Hand
How to Settle Accounts with Your Laundress
If I Had a Thousand a Year
If the Cap Fits
I'll-Treated Il Trovatore
The Illustrious Stranger
In for a Holiday
In the Wrong House
Inkle and Yarico
Ireland as It Is
The Irish Attorney
The Irish Lion
The Iron Chest
(2 folders)

BOX 11

Jane Eyre
Jenny Lind at Last
Jessie Brown
John Bull
(2 folders)
Little Em'ly
Marie
Mary's Birthday
Mazeppa
A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion
Mr. Scroggins
My Friend Isaac
Nature's Nobleman
Nearly a Tragedy
The Nervous Man and the Man of Nerve
Never Reckon Your Chickens

Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890

Container

Contents

	<i>New Footman</i>
	<i>A New Way to Pay Old Debts</i>
	<i>The Naiad Queen</i> , with notes by Ford
	<i>Nick of the Woods</i>
	<i>No Thoroughfare</i>
	<i>The Noble Heart</i>
	<i>Nobody's Child</i>
	<i>Noemie</i>
	<i>Norah Creina</i>
	<i>Not at Home</i>
	<i>Not Guilty</i>
	<i>Nothing Like Paste</i>
	<i>Nothing Venture, Nothing Win</i>
BOX 12	<i>Nursey Chickweed</i>
	<i>Othello</i>
	<i>Our Clerks</i>
	<i>Pas de Fascination</i>
	<i>Peter Wilkins</i>
	<i>Pygmalion and Galatea</i>
	<i>Queen of the Frogs</i>
	<i>The Queen's Heart</i>
	<i>Richard the Second</i>
	<i>Richard the Third</i>
	<i>Richelieu</i>
	<i>Rival Tenants</i>
	<i>The Robber's Wife</i>
	<i>Romance and Reality</i>
	<i>The Rose of Ettrick Vale</i>
	<i>St. Mary's Eve</i>
	<i>Sam's Courtship</i>
	<i>Sarah the Creole</i>
	<i>Sardanapalus</i>
	<i>Satan in Paris</i>
	<i>The Sergeant's Wedding</i>
	<i>The Sergeant's Wife</i>
	<i>Scampini</i>
	<i>School</i>
	<i>School for Coquettes</i>
BOX 13	<i>The School for Prodigals</i>
	<i>The School of Reform</i>
	<i>A Scrap of Paper</i>
	<i>The Sea of Ice</i>
	<i>The Secret</i>
	<i>Seeing Warren</i>
	<i>Self</i>
	<i>She Stoops to Conquer</i>

BOX 14

A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing
The Sheriff of the County
Shocking Events
A Silent Protector
Sisterly Service
The Six Degrees of Crime
The Sleeper Awakened
The Social War of 1900
Speed the Plough
Stage Struck
The Streets of New York
The Stupid Servant
The Suspicious Husband
Sweethearts and Wives
The Swiss Cottage
There's No Smoke without Fire
An Uncle Too Many
Under the Gaslight
Vandyke Brown
The Vermont Wool-Dealer
Very Little Faust and More Mephistopheles
The Veteran
Victorine
Walter Brand
Wanted, a Young Lady
War to the Knife
Warlock of the Glen
Water Witches
The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish
Which of the Two?
White Farm
The White Horse of the Peppers
Whitbait at Greenwich
Who is Who?
Who Killed Cock Robin?
Why Women Weep
The Wicked World
Widow Freeheart
The Widow's Victim
The Wife
William Tell
The Winter's Tale
Wizard of the Wave
The Woman in Red
Woman's Vows and Mason's Oaths
The Wonder

Playbooks, 1809-circa 1890

Container

Contents

A Wonderful Woman
The Woodman's Hut
The Writing on the Wall
The Youthful Queen

BOX 15-17

Playbills, 1856-1881

Theater programs and broadsides.
Arranged chronologically under the name of the theater.

BOX 15

Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md.
22 Aug. 1856-1 Aug. 1857 *See Oversize*
7 Sept. 1860-18 Apr. 1861
21 Aug. 1861-22 July 1862 *See Oversize*
20 Aug. 1863-25 June 1864 *See Oversize*

BOX 16

1 Aug. 1867-11 June 1868
Feb.-June 1871 *See Oversize*
Ford's Grand Opera House, Baltimore, Md.
13 Sept. 1875-27 May 1876 *See Oversize*

BOX 17

2 Feb.-27 May 1876 (*The Stage*)
Sept. 1876-2 June 1877 *See Oversize*
18 Aug. 1879-28 May 1880 *See Oversize*
21 Aug. 1880-2 Apr. 1881 *See Oversize*
Ford's Athenaeum, Washington, D.C., 19 Mar.-31 Dec. 1862 *See Oversize*
Ford's New Theatre, Washington, D.C., 26 Aug. 1863-6 Aug. 1864 *See Oversize*

BOX 18-21

Scrapbooks, 1846-1923

Lizzie Ford's scrapbooks.
Arranged according to the numbers assigned to six of the volumes by Lizzie Ford, followed by a seventh unnumbered volume. Scrapbooks are accompanied by folders of loose material that had been inserted in the volumes.

BOX 18

Vol. 1
(2 folders)
Vol. 2
(2 folders)

BOX 19

Vol. 3
(2 folders)
Vol. 4
(2 folders)

BOX 20

Vol. 5 *See also Oversize*
(3 folders)
Vol. 6
(2 folders)

Scrapbooks, 1846-1923

Container	Contents
BOX 21	Vol. 7 (2 folders)
BOX 21-22	Addition, 1849-1960 Family correspondence, ledger, photocopies of autographs books, incomplete typescript biography of John Thompson Ford, a list of plays, printed matter, and other documents. Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material.
BOX 21	Account book for free summer excursions used as a notebook, 1876, undated Autograph books, photocopies Ford, Annie E., 1849-1877 Ford, Lizzie, 1867-1924 Charleston Theatre, Charleston, S.C., 1869-1870 Family correspondence, 1858-1886, 1893 (4 folders) Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., circa 1863, 1960, undated <i>See also Oversize</i> Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md., list of plays in library, 1874, undated "John T. Ford of Baltimore," incomplete biography by John Ford Sollers, undated
BOX 22	Ledger and scrapbook, 1869-1879 Menus, 1883-1889 Miscellany, 1915, undated Printed matter, 1859, 1870 (2 folders)
BOX OV 1-OV 12	Oversize, 1856-1893 Programs, broadsides, and a theater seating plan. Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Playbills Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, Md. 22 Aug. 1856-1 Aug. 1857 (Container 15)
BOX OV 2	21 Aug. 1861-22 July 1862 (Container 15)
BOX OV 3	20 Aug. 1863-25 June 1864 (Container 15)
BOX OV 4	Feb.-June 1871 (Container 16)
BOX OV 5	Ford's Grand Opera House, Baltimore, Md. 13 Sept. 1875-27 May 1876 (Container 16)
BOX OV 6	Sept. 1876-2 June 1877 (Container 17)
BOX OV 7	18 Aug. 1879-28 May 1880 (Container 17)
BOX OV 8	21 Aug. 1880-2 Apr. 1881 (Container 17)
BOX OV 9	Ford's Athenaeum, Washington, D.C. 19 Mar.-31 Dec. 1862 (Container 17) (1 vol.)
BOX OV 10	(1 vol.)
BOX OV 11	Ford's New Theatre, Washington, D.C. 26 Aug. 1863-6 Aug. 1864 (Container 17)
BOX OV 12	Scrapbooks Vol. 5, 1893 (Container 20)

Oversize, 1856-1893

Container

Contents

Addition

Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., circa 1863 (Container 21)