

Augusta County Historical Society
Acc #: 313
Robert E. Lee High School Drama Collection
1937-1946

Size: .5 inches (12 folders)

Historical/Biographical Note:

Joe Cohron was the director of the Robert E. Lee High School Drama Department from 1937-1942, although he took a leave of absence from fall 1940 to Fall 1941. The list of plays he directed is as follows: New Fires (1937); It Never Rains (1938); Beginner's Luck (1938); Berkeley Square (1938); Sun Up (1939); Elizabeth the Queen (1940), What A Life (1941); The Black Flamingo (1942). Cohron cared deeply about the students in his classes. At year end, 1940, students left messages such as "Don't forget us," and "There are many thing('s) I could write but you already know them," emphasize the students' mutual affection.

Scope & Content:

The Robert E. Lee High School Drama Collection consists of four series: Programs, Photographs, Artwork and Newspaper Clippings.

Programs are divided into Plays and Student Events. The folder for Plays contains a several programs of plays directed by Cohron during his tenure as director, as well as programs directed by Helen Harris (1937) and Elisabeth Whitelaw (1943). The folder for Student Events contains programs of special end-of-year, senior-class social events. These include two senior class banquet programs, one of which contains autographs and short messages from students. A few nights after the banquets were held, students held an event called Class Night in the auditorium, the programs of which list speeches, songs, awards, and often short plays on the agenda. The folder also contains the commencement announcement for 1940 and the calling cards of two students whose names recur in the Newspaper Clippings series.

Photographs primarily consist of photographs of live scenes and stage sets for various productions. Some negatives are also present. The folder titled "High school and beyond" contains photos of students in 1940, as well as photos of former students and himself. It is to Cohron's credit that virtually each person in each photograph is identified.

The **Artwork** series represents two plays: Elizabeth the Queen (1940) and The Black Flamingo (1942). Cohron's notes indicate that character sketches for Elizabeth were made by Mary Trenor (Pemberton) and were displayed in a Main Street shop window in downtown Staunton. Portrait sketches of students by the same artist were autographed by each student ; some with short messages. Portrait sketches for Flamingo, by the same artist, are larger (8" x 10"), but are not autographed by students.

Newspaper Clippings are the epilogue of this collection. Cohron's interest in his former students is fully realized in his clippings of several students who married or entered World War II military service upon graduation. After viewing other series in the collection, several of the names in the newspaper clippings will be familiar to the researcher. As these students received honors or special assignments, or were killed in action, Cohron saved clippings reporting these events. Cohron also continued to show an interest in the drama department after his directorship ended, as suggested by clippings from plays between 1945-1946.

Organization/Arrangement:

- Folder 1: Programs: Plays, 1937-1943 (13 items)
- Folder 2: Programs: Student Events, 1937-1942 (9 items)
- Folder 3: Photographs: New Fires, 1937 (1 item; 2 images)
- Folder 4: Photographs: Elizabeth the Queen, 1940 (11 items)
- Folder 5: Photographs: What a Life, 1941 (5 items)
- Folder 6: Photographs: The Black Flamingo, 1942 (13 items)
- Folder 7: Photographs: High school and beyond, 1940-c.1945 (11 items)
- Folder 8: Artwork: Elizabeth the Queen, 1940 (17 items)
- Folder 9: Artwork: The Black Flamingo, 1942 (11 items)
- Folder 10: Newspaper Clippings: High school and beyond, c.1945
- Folder 11: Newspaper Clippings: Plays, 1945-1946