

Case Study

SUSAN E. DAVIS, editor

Chicago Dance Collection: A Case in *Pointe*

CAROLYN A. SHEEHY

Abstract: The Newberry Library, a privately endowed research library in Chicago, began in 1981 to develop a manuscript collection in the field of dance. The author describes how an idea was initiated by a paraprofessional staff member, encouraged by researchers, fostered by a curator, supported by the administration, and energized by volunteers to create and develop the Chicago Dance Collection.

About the author: Carolyn A. Sheehy was centrally involved with the Chicago Dance Collection between 1981 and 1988 while on the staff of the Newberry Library. She is now director of library services, Oesterle Library at North Central College, Naperville, Illinois. She has an M.A. in dance from Mills College and an M.A. in library and information studies from Northern Illinois University. She delivered an earlier version of this paper at the spring meeting of the Midwest Archives Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 6 May 1988. The author wishes to thank Diana Haskell, Lloyd Lewis Curator of Modern Manuscripts at the Newberry Library, for her support and comments in the writing of this article.

THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY, a privately endowed research library in the humanities located in Chicago and founded in 1887, acquires materials in a number of specific subject areas, such as the Renaissance, Native Americans, music, cartography, printing, and local and family history. These unique collections are bound by the thread of Western civilization from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. Although the library is rich in cultural treasures, it was not until nine years ago that it actively sought to collect manuscript materials on the history of dance in the Midwest. Prior to this time, printed items on the history of dance were acquired passively through gifts or through purchases in other established areas of collecting.

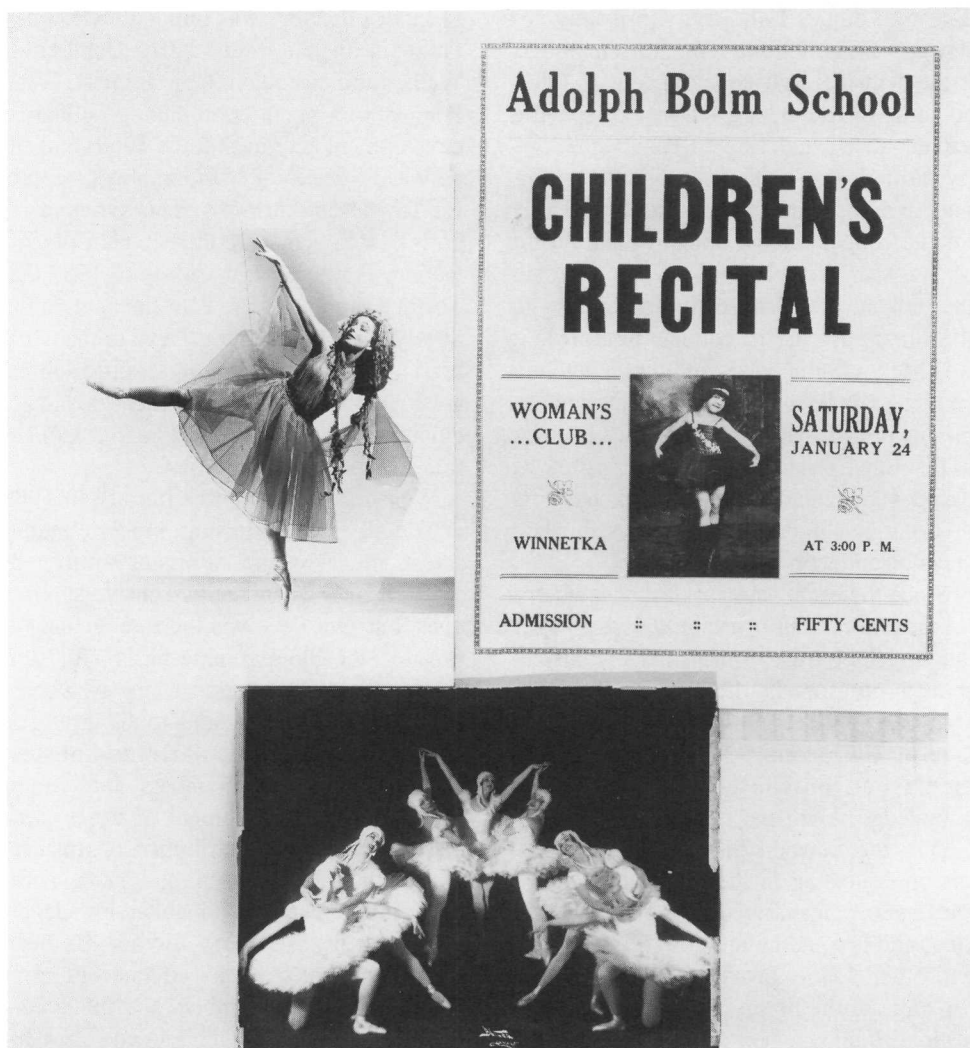
Since the establishment of the Newberry Library more than one hundred years ago, the board of trustees has had overall responsibility for the library's collections. Until the founding of the John Crerar Library in Chicago in 1893, the trustees recommended purchases in all fields of knowledge. With the establishment of the Crerar, the Newberry Library began to focus on collecting in the humanities, while the Crerar concentrated on science, medicine, and law. Although gifts from trustees and other donors provided the foundation for some of the library's major named collections, bibliographers and custodians (such as Pierce Butler, first custodian of the John M. Wing Foundation, and Ruth Lapham Butler, custodian of the Edward E. Ayer Collection for over forty years) had considerable authority for expanding these collections and for adding materials in their areas of subject expertise.

During the presidencies of Stanley Pargellis (1942-62) and Lawrence W. Towner (1963-86), these chief librarians made important collection development decisions based on opportunities presented to their office or on their personal commitment to new areas of collecting. (One new area of collecting, the Midwest Modern Manu-

scripts Collection, was initiated by Stanley Pargellis in the mid-1940s.) James M. Wells, third custodian of the John M. Wing Foundation, began coordinating collection development activities in the 1960s and supervised a series of bibliographers' reports for Towner in the 1970s. This series of reports led to a more coherent plan of collecting. However, it wasn't until 1983 that Towner appointed Dr. Paul Saenger as the library's first Collection Development Librarian. Today selectors in specific subject areas, appointed by the president, make acquisition recommendations to the Collection Development Librarian.

Why did the Newberry Library in 1981 decide to start collecting modern manuscripts in a new and surprisingly different area—dance? There are two answers to this question. One involves the intellectual rationale—the bibliographic basis—for supporting such a collection at the Newberry Library. The other pertains to the influence of individuals, particularly non-professional library staff members and volunteers, on the establishment of a new area of collecting. The contribution of trustees, presidents, donors, bibliographers, curators, and researchers to collection development at the Newberry Library has been well documented. The influence of non-professional staff members and volunteers on the process is less well known. The Chicago Dance Collection at the Newberry Library is an example of the impact such individuals can have on an institution's collecting history.

The Newberry Library's bibliographic foundation for a modern manuscripts dance collection includes such important sixteenth- through nineteenth-century primary sources on dance as Fabritio Caroso's *Il ballarino* (Venetia, 1581), Cesare Negri's *Nuove inventioni di balli* (Milano, 1604), Jean Georges Noverre's *Lettres sur la danse, et sur les ballets* (Lyon, 1760), and Carlo Blasis's *Notes upon dancing, historical and practical* (London, 1847). In addition, the

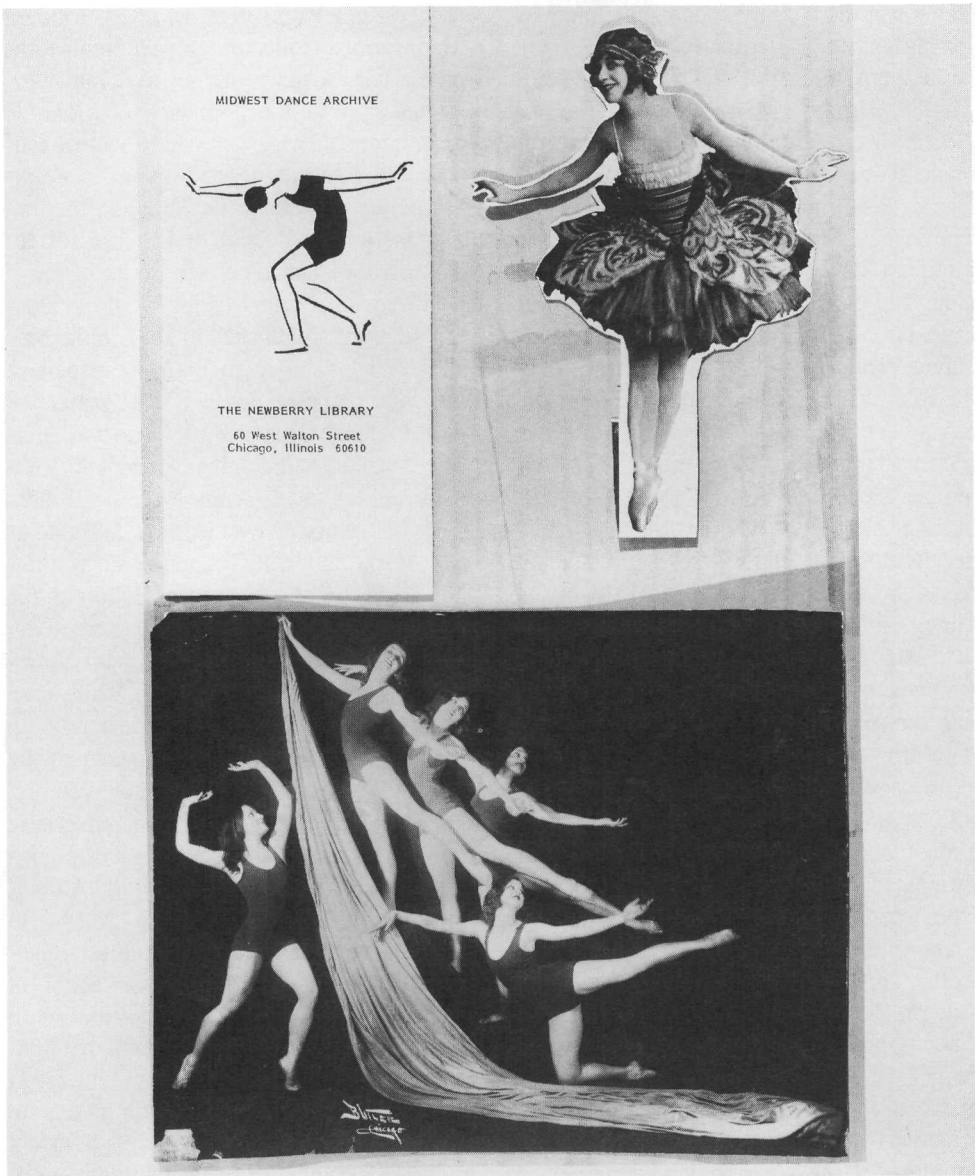


Top Row (left to right): Photograph of Ruth Page in "Hist-wist" (1943), Ann Barzel Collection, The Newberry Library; Poster for Adolph Bolm School of Dance, Ann Barzel Collection, The Newberry Library; Bottom: Photograph of Pavley-Oukrainsky Ballet's "Ballet Classique" (1930), Ann Barzel Collection, The Newberry Library.

library's music collection is world renowned and includes music for the dancer ranging from minuets, gavottes, pavannes, and waltzes to fox trots and tangos. The J. Francis Driscoll Collection of American Popular Sheet Music offers unique opportunities for both social and cultural historians as well as dance historians. Hidden sources of dance materials in the library

can be found in its Native American holdings, Renaissance and medieval materials, courtesy books, theater scrapbooks (Flora Mayer Witkowsky Collection of Theater Programs and Auditorium Theater scrapbooks), and Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection.

The purpose of the Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection is to acquire man-



Top Row (left to right): First brochure for the Midwest Dance Archive (1983), The Newberry Library Archives; Photograph of Edris Milar in Pavley-Oukrainsky Ballet's "Butterfly," Ann Barzel Collection, The Newberry Library; Bottom: Photograph of Pavley-Oukrainsky Ballet's "Blue Danube," Ann Barzel Collection, The Newberry Library.

uscript materials, which reflect the collecting policies of the library, from the Midwest for the period from approximately 1800-1930. The Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection contains rich but unrecognized

materials for dance history research in its papers of Midwest composers and authors and its archives of prominent Chicago social clubs. The Arts Club of Chicago archives documents early visits, recitals, and

lectures at the club by such dance luminaries as Anna Pavlova (1925), Harald Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi (1929), Martha Graham (1930), Leonide Massine (1931), Merce Cunningham and Jean Erdman (1943), Ted Shawn (1945), Ruth St. Denis (1946), and Alicia Markova (1946). The Friday Club archives offers nostalgic glimpses into exclusive Chicago dancing clubs and classes established after the Chicago Fire. Even the Newberry Library archives contains items that reflect not only the role of dance in the cultural life of the city's gentry but also the relationship of the library to that elite. For example, a 26 September 1941 letter from George Utley, librarian of the Newberry Library, gave permission for a class in aesthetic dancing for eight or ten women to be held in the library on Wednesday mornings from 10:15 to 11:15 for three months provided that "members of the reference staff may go into the room to get books while the class is in progress."¹

Chicago composers played an important role in the early history of dance in the United States. The papers of John Alden Carpenter and Henry Eichheim, both of whom composed music for ballets, can be found in the Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection. Carpenter wrote the score for Adolph Bolm's first ballet for the Chicago Civic Opera, "The Birthday of the Infanta" (1919), for "Krazy Kat" (1922), and for what is generally recognized as America's first jazz ballet, "Skyscrapers" (produced at the Metropolitan Opera House on 19 February 1926). Henry Eichheim, born in Chicago in 1870, composed the music for Adolph Bolm's ballet "The Rivals" (1925) and for "The Moon, My Shadow and I" (to a poem suggested to him by noted Chicago dancer and choreog-

rapher Ruth Page). The Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection also contains the papers of Chicago composer Rudolph Ganz, including his correspondence with Harald Kreutzberg (1935) and E. Jacques-Dalcroze (undated).

Literary papers in the Midwest Modern Manuscripts Collection hold surprises for dance researchers. The manuscript of Floyd Dell's poem, "On Seeing Isadora Duncan's Pupils" (published in 1915 in the *New York Tribune*), is included in the papers of this editor of *The Masses*. The papers of writer Henry Blake Fuller, poet Eunice Tietjens, journalist John Drury, and journalist and artist Marion Neville all hold correspondence between those individuals and Mark Turbyfill, founder with Katherine Dunham of the Negro Ballet in the 1930s. The papers of teacher and writer Morton Dauwen Zabel contain his correspondence with Lincoln Kirstein, while those of author Ben Hecht provide materials on Hecht's 1946 film of "The Specter of the Rose," in which he attempted to fuse ballet, music, and drama with cinema. These rich and varied dance holdings offered a substantial base on which to build a manuscripts collection in dance.

The second vital factor in the establishment of the Chicago Dance Collection at the Newberry Library is the contribution of a number of individuals, particularly non-professional library staff and volunteers. I held a paraprofessional position as a Rare Book Room/Modern Manuscripts assistant in the Department of Special Collections at the Newberry Library from 1977 to 1981. This position allowed me an opportunity not only to explore the library's holdings but also to interact with researchers working in what was then called "The Rare Book Room." My exploration of heretofore hidden dance sources (a quest stimulated in part by my M.A. in dance) in the Newberry Library and my discussions with two researchers studying the library's dance materials (Dr. Edward Pease of Western

¹Letter from George Utley, president and librarian, Newberry Library, 26 September 1941, Newberry Library Archives.

Kentucky University and Dr. Gretchen Schneider of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation) resulted in an effort to start a midwest dance collection at the Newberry Library.²

The Midwest has a strong and exciting dance history. Unfortunately, few of its citizens, including local dancers and choreographers, know that history. Before George Balanchine reached the shores of the United States in 1933, Chicago had America's first professional touring ballet company, the Pavley-Oukrainsky Ballet, founded in 1922. Adolph Bolm's "Chicago Allied Artists" billed itself from 1924 to 1927 as the first ballet theater in the United States. According to writer Jack Anderson, "It can be seriously argued that from World War I to just before the start of World War II Chicago was America's ballet capital."³ And ballet was not the only form of dance represented in the Midwest. From modern to tap to jazz, dance in the Midwest has been varied and vigorous.

One possible reason for the general ignorance about Midwest dance history may be that no single library, archives, or museum in the Midwest had systematically collected and publicized the records of that history. Although a few Midwest repositories, such as the Chicago Historical Society and Southern Illinois University, had collected some Midwest dance materials, no regional repository in the late 1970s had publicly declared itself to be the collecting center for Midwest dance history. Without such a commitment from a local repository, much of the region's dance materials had been lost forever. Of the materials found and preserved, many items were housed in repositories outside the area. For example,

the papers of noted Midwestern dancer and choreographer Ruth Page are housed in the New York Public Library Dance Collection.

In addition to the Newberry Library's bibliographic basis for establishing such a collection, the institution had other unique features that made it an excellent candidate for undertaking this responsibility. Its Research and Development Office actively promoted the use of the library's collections, coordinated an extensive fellowship program that provided scholars with an opportunity to come to Chicago to study the library's holdings, and planned programs, events, and exhibits highlighting and publicizing the library's treasures. The Newberry Library also had the space and the resources to house and preserve such a collection in its newly constructed, environmentally controlled stack building and its in-house conservation laboratory. Staff expertise in acquiring, processing, and assisting users with such materials could be found in the Department of Special Collections.

My rationale that the Newberry Library was the institution to accept this challenge received support from the curator of Modern Manuscripts, Diana Haskell. Without the curator's strong endorsement, the proposal would have gone no further. However, with her support, administrative approval was sought and received, first from James M. Wells and then from Lawrence W. Towner. While the library administration made plans to establish a midwest dance collection, Polly Krakora, administrator of the School of the Chicago City Ballet and volunteer at the Newberry Library, was discussing with noted Chicago dance critic and writer Ann Barzel the possibility that the Barzel collection, totalling over 136 linear feet, might come to the library. At the opening of the exhibit "Measured Steps: Dance Literature Through the Ages" on 12 October 1981, President Lawrence W. Towner announced that Barzel's papers

²Edward Pease, "The Newberry Library: Some Rare Primary Sources on Dancing, 1581-1868," *Dance Research Journal* 14/1&2 (1981-82):76-77.

³Jack Anderson, "Chicago Was Once America's Ballet Capital," *New York Times*, 1 April 1984, II, 10:1.

would be coming to the library and would "provide us with the foundation for a collection on contemporary dance that we are sure will be useful to dance researchers all over the midwest."⁴

The Newberry Library's new collecting direction also received the support of the doyenne of dance librarians, Genevieve Oswald, curator of the New York Public Library's Dance Collection. When Haskell wrote to Oswald in February 1983 about the Barzel collection and the Newberry's growing dance archives, Oswald graciously responded on 3 March 1983 that "If we can do anything to help you, please let us do so. . . . Our best wishes for great success. Please come to see us when you can and let us know what your problems are."⁵

In the fall of 1983, I assumed responsibility for the Midwest Dance Archive and wrote its first collection policy and developed its first brochure. The collection policy reflected the archive's ambitious goals. The Midwest Dance Archive would acquire materials in a variety of formats on subjects ranging from dance history, dance criticism, dancers and choreographers, dance companies, dance schools, and dance music to professional dance organizations in the twelve midwestern states. Costumes, scenery, artifacts, and recordings were the only types of materials excluded from the policy. No chronological cut-off date was given. Printed materials supporting the collection would also be sought. The Midwest Dance Archive's first brochure introduced readers not only to Ann Barzel and her collection but also to three other individuals who had donated their papers to the new collection: Walter Camryn, choreographer

of more than twenty ballets and founder with Bentley Stone of the Stone-Camryn School of Dance in Chicago; Diana Huebert, modern dancer and director of her own Chicago troupe of sixteen dancers; and Edna McRae, dancer with the Pavley-Oukrainisky Ballet and nationally recognized Chicago dance teacher.

Since 1983, the name of the collection has been changed twice and the original collection policy revised twice. The first major name change and collection policy revision occurred on 14 March 1985. At the request of President Towner, the collection's name was altered to "Midwest Dance Collection" in order to describe its holdings more accurately as a collection of archives and papers rather than the archives of one company. A new brochure was issued, adding the papers of Chicago dancers Margot Grimmer, Dorothy Hild, and Bentley Stone, as well as selected essays of Ruth Page, to the list of gifts to the library. The collection policy was revised, chiefly to narrow the acquisition of secondary print material. The new policy severely limited the purchase of dance materials to support the collection. Dance reference tools that previously would have gone to Special Collections were now housed on another floor in the library's new Reference and Bibliographic Center.

The Midwest Dance Collection grew rapidly, not only in size but also in visibility. However, increased library fiscal restraints and a reevaluation of institutional collecting priorities caused the administration to examine this growth. On 20 January 1986, Joel L. Samuels, director of library services, called for a review of the nature and uses of the Midwest Dance Collection, "both as an issue of collecting policy and as an activity requiring staff energy."⁶ At

⁴Speech by Lawrence W. Towner, president and librarian, Newberry Library, 12 October 1981, Newberry Library Archives.

⁵Letter from Genevieve Oswald, curator, Dance Collection, the New York Public Library, 3 March 1983, Newberry Library Archives.

⁶Memorandum from Joel L. Samuels, administrative vice president and deputy librarian, Newberry Library, 20 January 1986, Newberry Library Archives.

the time this memorandum was issued, I spent approximately 60 percent of my time in Special Collections working on the collection. Other staff members were involved in dance-related events at the library, such as "An Evening with John Neumeier" (25 June 1984), "It Takes Two To Tango," premiering a new work by the Hubbard Street Dance Company and announcing the acquisition of the company's archives (23 January 1986), and "An Evening with Agnes DeMille" (16 April 1986). After reviewing the documentation tracing the development of the collection, Towner issued a memorandum on 14 March 1986 indicating that, while "the record of activity and of success in collecting impresses me," budget constraints necessitated a temporary hold on time spent developing the collection.⁷ On 23 July 1986, he (and the President's Council) concluded that staff time spent on the collection should be severely restricted and that donations to it should be reviewed by the Library Book Selection Committee under the direction of Paul Saenger.⁸ These changes were made.

With the retirement of Towner and the arrival of newly appointed President Charles T. Cullen in the fall of 1986, the status of the collection was again reviewed. On 27 January 1987, the second major collection name change and collection policy revision occurred. To reflect a narrower collecting focus, the collection was renamed the "Chicago Dance Collection." The new collection policy included only materials representing Chicago dance history; Chicago dance criticism; Chicago dancers and choreographers; Chicago dance companies and international dance troupes that performed locally; Chicago dance schools and professional Chicago dance organizations. All existing collections met these criteria. The policy continued to exclude costumes

and scenery. The library would also only acquire print materials written by or about a subject whose papers were part of the collection or those on the history of dance in Chicago.

If the idea for the Chicago Dance Collection was germinated by a paraprofessional, encouraged by two researchers, fostered by a curator, and supported by the administration, its success was enhanced by a donor turned volunteer, Ann Barzel. Barzel, who had been encouraged by a library volunteer to give her papers to the Newberry Library, herself became a volunteer after donating her collection. She has helped to sort its more than 136 linear feet of materials. She has also spoken and written about the Chicago Dance Collection at every available opportunity. She has encouraged dancers, choreographers, and teachers not only to give their papers to the library but also to use the collection for their own research and study. Her energy, expertise, and enthusiasm have been vital to the growth of the collection.

Many volunteers have played an essential role in the development of the Chicago Dance Collection, particularly in the areas of processing and cataloging. Only the papers of Walter Camryn and Bentley Stone came with cataloging funds that enabled the library to hire Chicago Public Library theater archivist and former Newberry Library staff member Lauren Bufferd to catalog them. However, with much processing work to be done and no paid staff to do it, I set up cataloging schemes for four volunteers (Marjorie Benson, Patricia Jacobson, Carolyn Mulac, and Ann Parks), who worked as a team with Barzel, to use in sorting the Ann Barzel Collection. When I became administrative curator of Special Collections and could no longer supervise their work, a volunteer "team captain" trained new volunteers and supervised the regulars. With my departure from the Newberry Library in 1988, the curator of Modern Manuscripts, Diana Haskell, assumed responsi-

⁷Memorandum from Towner, 14 March 1986.

⁸Memorandum from Towner, 23 July 1986.

bility for the collection and supervision of the volunteers, continuing her unwavering support of the dance collection.

The Chicago Dance Collection continues to grow and to insure that a historical record of dance in the area is preserved. Today it includes the archives of two major dance companies (Hubbard Street Dance Company and Chicago City Ballet), the papers of ten teachers, dancers, choreographers, and writers (Ann Barzel, Walter Camryn, Margot Grimmer, Dorothy Hild, Diana Huebert, Iva Kitchell, Edna McRae,

Ruth Pryor, Elisa Stigler, and Bentley Stone), and selected essays of Ruth Page. It is doubtful that the Newberry Library would have established a Chicago Dance Collection had the idea not been proposed by a library staff member. If library volunteers had not provided such tremendous assistance, the Chicago Dance Collection could not have grown so quickly and so successfully. The collection has not only enriched the area's cultural heritage but has also added another treasure to a library that abounds in bibliographic richness.