



"Culture Knows No Boundaries"

May-August, 2018

Our summer exhibit brings to life this quote by Margaret Brown on her performances in the roles of the famous French actress Sarah Bernhardt. In a Paris newspaper from January 20th, 1929, she stated:

"Some people find it strange that an American woman should aspire to play the roles of Bernhardt. I recall, too, that some people smirked when I brought home ancient statuary from Egypt and decorated up a few acres of the Rocky Mountains for my home, but I am sure that those who know the place will agree that culture knows no boundaries and that fine arts are international."

To Mrs. Brown, arts and culture spanned across the seas, and her eclectic taste is evident in her home décor, her fundraising efforts, and in her own personal artistic achievements.

We are celebrating the Brown family's involvement in the arts with an exhibit titled in Mrs. Brown's words, "Culture Knows No Boundaries." You will see the Browns' souvenirs brought back from travels abroad. You will go to Hollywood with son Larry's career in the early film industry. And you will experience the remarkable artistic talents of Mrs. Brown, her daughter Helen and her nieces Grace, Helen and Florence.

With the end of World War I, the passage of women's suffrage in 1920 and J.J.'s death in 1922, Mrs. Brown joined a cultural renaissance. It was a national post-war

movement in which urban Americans explored art, music and theater to a greater degree. Mrs. Brown acted in many successful productions in Paris and New York including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Cleopatra* and *L'Aiglon*, in which she performed the role of one of her heroes, French actress Sarah Bernhardt. She travelled and performed throughout the later part of her life, often for charity benefits and fundraisers, and continued to study and teach acting.

During her time in Paris, Mrs. Brown lived in a neighborhood on the affluent right bank. Her reputation in Paris was one of high honor and a newspaper exclaimed that she was “the uncrowned queen of smart Paris.” Her acting talent was recognized in 1929 when she received the Palm of the Academy Award for dramatic arts, a very high honor among French performers.

She used her love of arts and theater to fundraise for important causes, like the preservation of the Eugene Field house in Denver. Poet Eugene Field came to Denver in 1881 as the new editor of the *Denver Tribune* and rented a small cottage at 315 W. Colfax Ave (just west of Civic Center Park). He became known as the children’s poet, author of *Wynken, Blynken, and Nod* and *Little Boy Blue*.

Mrs. Brown discovered the Field house in 1927 and made efforts to restore and preserve it as the “Eugene Field Memorial.” On November 2, she hosted an official dedication and fundraiser for the home in which she directed an evening’s worth of performances for one hundred guests that included her own renditions of Field’s poems, “The Two Opinions” and “Our Lady of the Mine.” Local singers and dancers also entertained. In the spring of 1930, she presented the house to the city of Denver and it was relocated to Washington Park where it stands today.

Mrs. Brown’s children and nieces, whom she raised as her own upon the death of her sister-in-law, were also very involved in the arts and some became quite famous. Her son Larry began working in the film industry in the late 1920s with John Gorman productions. He worked as general manager on the 1926 silent film *Home Sweet Home*, as well as five other pictures with Gorman. While on set of *Home Sweet Home*, he met and married his second wife, actress Mildred Gregory who starred in the film. Eventually Larry quit the filmmaking business and moved on to selling insurance and real estate before becoming active in mining again.

Larry's sister Helen entertained and performed for many of their mother's events including fundraisers. She led the opening grand march at the Catholic Fair, an event put on by Mrs. Brown in 1900 to raise money for the new Catholic Cathedral, called the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception. You can see it today on the corner of Colfax and Logan, just a few blocks from the Browns' home. Mrs. Brown had a satin and ermine medieval-style dress made special for Helen's performance.

Mrs. Brown was often joined in her theatrical pursuits by her niece, Helen Tobin Kosure, who became a popular dancer and Broadway actress. She wowed the crowd in her dancing exposition in 1914 in Newport with her version of *Lulufado* and the *Argentine Serenade*, the latest Parisian favorite. In the 1920s, she changed her name to "Helene" and starred in the 1927 play *The Cradle Snatchers*, alongside Humphrey Bogart. Bogart's success in *The Cradle Snatchers* led to roles in film where he eventually became a Hollywood star.

The Brown family's work in film did not end with Larry, Mildred, and Helene. Helene's sister, Grace Tobin Carroll enrolled her daughter, Dorothy, in the silent short films called *Our Gang*. The series eventually became known as *The Little Rascals*. Grace herself was a dancer and was introduced into society at an early age by Mrs. Brown.

In Europe, Helen's and Grace's sister Florence Tobin Harper studied art, music and dancing. She studied with famous dancer and feminist Isadora Duncan and performed her dances throughout Europe and America. While studying in Germany, Florence made an appearance before the German emperor who presented her with a metal for her performance. Mrs. Brown travelled to meet her in Germany in 1913, and on their way home on board the *Imperator*, they helped organize a benefit to raise money for the Seaman's Widows and Orphans Fund. Florence entertained at the fundraiser, performing a dance called *Hindoo's Maiden Prayer*. Back in Denver, she established a reputation as "one of the best classical dancers."

Look for these artifacts in the house!

Entryway and Parlor: International art from the Browns' travels

- ❖ **1920s photos of the sphinx installation** – Mrs. Brown brought home these marble sphinx statues from Egypt. She noted that "people smirked" at this sight, but to her, "fine arts are international."

- ❖ **Turkish corner, Indian lamps, Japanese tray, Russian umbrella stand, Italian statues, French artwork** – the Browns showed off their international taste in art in their home.
- ❖ **1920s beaded dress from Paris** (on loan from History Colorado) - Mrs. Brown also brought back worldly fashions. Her seamstress, Mary Mulligan, created new looks for her by taking inspiration from Parisian gowns.

Library: Margaret's performance fundraiser to save the Eugene Field House

- ❖ **Books of Eugene Field**
- ❖ **Postcard** with photo of Eugene Field and a poem written by him.
- ❖ **Valentine poem by Eugene Field** in Ladies Home Journal
- ❖ **1930 Newspaper clipping** from the Rocky Mountain News – Mrs. Brown was not pleased about the idea of turning his house into a library.
- ❖ **Photo of Mrs. Brown with the “dancing girls”** – These girls performed at the Field house fundraiser.
 - “With fitting ceremonies, the old home of Eugene Field at 315 W Colfax Ave. was opened as a memorial yesterday afternoon. In picture are Mrs. J. J. Brown who made the memorial possible, and the little dancing girls who contributed to the program.”
- ❖ **Photo of the Eugene Field House** (original at DPL) – shown in its original location on Colfax. It was relocated to Washington Park where it stands today.
- ❖ **Program** (original at DPL) from Mrs. Brown's fundraiser for the Eugene Field House.
- ❖ **Newspaper clipping** (original at DPL) about Mrs. Brown's interpretation of “Our Lady of the Mines,” one of Field's poems, from the fundraiser.

Helen's Room: Helen helps her mother at the Catholic Fair

- ❖ **Original print of Helen** ready for the Catholic Fair – Helen led her mother's fundraiser for the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception on Colfax and Logan.
- ❖ **Photo from the Catholic Fair** (original at DPL), called the “Carnival of Nations.”
 - “All the world and its mother visited the Catholic Fair last week.” (Denver Times, Nov 25, 1900).
- ❖ **Late 1800s skirt and shoes.**

Margaret's Room: Margaret performs

- ❖ **Recreation of Mrs. Brown's French clown costume** – copy of the one worn by Mrs. Brown for a performance, made by our docent Fran Schilt.

- ❖ **Photo of Mrs. Brown and Helen Tobin** in a performance (original from the Vollrath collection)
- ❖ **Book *L'aiglon*** – a play performed by Mrs. Brown in the role of Sarah Bernhardt.
- ❖ **Palm of the Academy of France award** (not Mrs. Brown's) – she was awarded the Palm in 1929 in recognition of her work in dramatic art.
 - Mrs. Brown had “won by her own merits the position as uncrowned queen of smart Paris society. In all of the smart restaurants and theaters where society leaders gather, Mrs. Brown is a favorite. ...She has gone in for old world culture with the same strenuous manner she has aided American literature [and] pays regular, pious pilgrimage to the tomb of the Divine Sarah. She has studied opera and has no mean voice, and her Gallic wit has been bolstered by reading the French classics.” (Paris clipping, Jan 20, 1929)

Tobin Room: Margaret's nieces act and dance

- ❖ **Photos** (originals at HCC) of Grace Tobin Carroll (dancer), Helen Tobin (dancer and actress), and Florence Tobin (dancer and actress).
- ❖ **1927 playbill for “The Cradle Snatchers”** – Helen (“Helene”) Tobin starred in the 1927 play “The Cradle Snatchers,” also starring Humphrey Bogart. This play led to roles in film for Bogart, which eventually led to his stardom.
- ❖ **Films:**
 - **Trailer of the remake of “The Cradle Snatchers,”** called “Why Leave Home?” – The Broadway play starred Helene Tobin.
 - **Clip of Isadora Duncan dancing** – Florence Tobin studied with Duncan and performed her dances.
 - **“Our Gang” short** - Grace's daughter Dorothy was a child actress in this series, which was later renamed “The Little Rascals.”

Larry's Room: Larry's & Mildred's Hollywood careers

- ❖ **Photos of Mildred on set of “According to Law,” 1915** – from Larry Brown's scrapbook, *on loan from History Colorado*.
- ❖ **Film poster of “Home Sweet Home”** – Larry produced this film and Mildred starred in it; from Larry Brown's scrapbook, *on loan from History Colorado*.
- ❖ **John Gorman Productions agreement** – with signatures of John Gorman and Lawrence Brown, *on loan from History Colorado*.