



CLARA THOMAS ARCHIVES

**Inventory of the
Robert A. Lawson fonds**

Inventory #F0521

The digitization of this finding aid was made possible - in part or entirely - through the Canadian Culture Online Program of Canadian Heritage, the National Archives of Canada and the Canadian Council of Archives.

Fonds/Collection Number: F0521

Title: Robert A. Lawson fonds

Dates: 1958-1982

Extent: 5149 slides : col.
579 photographs : b&w
7 photographs : col.
ca. 5593 negatives
0.3 m textual records

**Biographical Sketch/
Administrative History:** Robert A. Lawson (1926-), production designer and teacher, was born in Toronto and attended Riverdale Collegiate Secondary School. Enlisting in the Canadian Army in 1944, he pursued studies at the Ontario College of Art through the Department of Veteran Affairs programme and graduated in 1950. After teaching and doing restoration work at the Toronto Art Gallery (now the Art Galley of Ontario) for five years, he pursued further conservation and restoration studies financed by scholarships both at the National Gallery in Ottawa, and in Istanbul on a Harvard scholarship. On his return from Turkey in 1954, Lawson began working in the paint shop of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) as a scenic artist painting scenery, furniture and props, was promoted to assistant designer in 1956, and designer in 1958. Lawson first designed for variety shows, but attracted particular recognition for his work in opera, ballet, operetta and plays, working closely with Norman Campbell during the heyday of live television performances at the CBC. He subsequently mastered the intricacies of designing for television film work in series such as *The Road*, *Hatch's Mill*, *Wojeck* and *Quentin Durgens*, M.P. During this period, Lawson, Campbell and colleague Joe Parkinson perfected the special effects Chroma-Key technique which facilitated the melding of two or more pictures into a single frame, resulting in invitations to lecture on the practice throughout North America. Lawson's work attracted Emmy nominations and other awards, and his professional expertise in all areas of production design was recognized in 1977 when he became the first designer elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. He is a founding member and past president of the Associated Designers of Canada. A self-taught photographer, Lawson acquired a habit of photographing the productions on which he worked, often developing his own photographs. In the process, Lawson created an invaluable archive documenting the early days of Canadian television. In 1980, Lawson was appointed as design and staging director for the CBC in British Columbia, Canada. He retired from the CBC in 1985 in the face of severe budget cuts that effectively closed the design department.

Scope and Content: The fonds consists primarily of colour slides and black and white negatives that chronicle Lawson's activities over 25 years as a CBC production designer, particularly with colleague and friend, producer Norman Campbell, and their collaborations for CBC artistic television productions such as *The Gondoliers* (1962), *Romeo and Juliet* with Celia Franca (1965), *Hansel and Gretel* with Maureen Forrester (1970), *Giselle* (1975), *Cinderella* with Veronica Tennant, Jeremy Blanton and Lois Smith (1968), *Swan Lake* with Erik Bruhn and Lois Smith (1961 and 1967), *the Nutcracker* with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (1974), *la Rondine* with Teresa Stratas (1971), *The Wonder of It All* (1972), and the *Karen Kain Super Special* (1978). Other programs documented include *More Joy in Heaven* (1964), *Hatch's Mill*, *The Masseys*, *Stephen Leacock*, *Wayne and Shuster* television specials, *A Case for the Court*, *Troubled Heart*, *Wojeck*, and *The Road* among other programmes. There are also previously unseen photographs of pianist Glenn Gould with violinist Yehudi Menuhin in 1965, and in conversation with Bruno Monsaingeon in 1980. The photographs include many candid shots of iconic Canadian stage and television personalities including Gordon Pinsent, Celia Franca, Karen Kain, Veronica Tennant, Nadia Potts, Erik Bruhn, Norman Campbell, Wayne and Shuster, Christopher Plummer, Maureen Forrester, Margot Kidder, Robert Farnon, and others. Records also include some storyboards, drawings, slides and notes related to the Chroma-Key technique developed by Lawson and Campbell, program reviews, clippings, complimentary and congratulatory letters to and from Lawson, and about Lawson's work.

F0521 - Robert A. Lawson fonds

Restrictions on No restrictions on access.

Access and Use: Copyright for the Lawson photographs has been transferred to York University in Toronto. Requests for permission to publish should be directed to the University Archivist.

Finding Aid: File list available.

URL of Finding Aid: <http://archivesfa.library.yorku.ca/fonds/ON00370-f0000521.htm>

Accruals: The fonds comprises the following accessions: 2007-037. No further accruals are expected.

Related Records: Related records can be found in the Norman Campbell fonds (F0476). Other related material may be found in the Robert Christie fonds (F0192), Victor Feldbrill fonds (F0483), Mavor Moore fonds (F0359), Eric Till fonds (F0503).

Physical Condition: Colour slides are in excellent condition. There is some minor water damage to some of the prints.

Immediate source of acquisition: Donated by Lawson in 2007.

Provenance Access Points: Lawson, Robert A.

Date of creation: 2008/07/04

Date of last revision: 2008/07/08