

Katharine Cornell

Katharine Cornell, was born in Berlin, Germany in 1893. But her family were rich American socialites, already interested in theatre, and she was raised in Buffalo, New York.

As a child, I spent all of my vacations in Cobourg. They were wonderful summers, and for that reason, it always seemed much more like home to me than Buffalo.

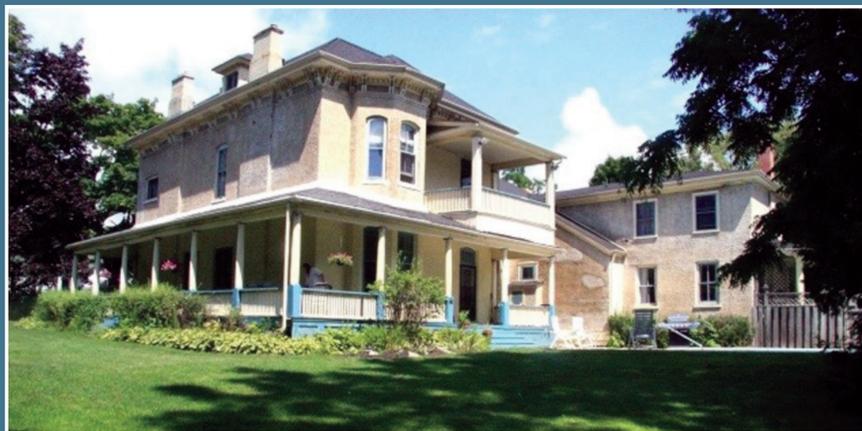
Katharine took naturally to the world of the stage and eventually became known as “the First Lady of the Theatre”, and is still regarded as one of Broadway's greatest leading ladies.

(As a child) my companions and I gave plays in our gardens. It was in Cobourg, I think, that I first acquired a leaning towards the theatre.

In 1915, Katharine’s mother died, leaving her sufficient money to be independent, which enabled her to leave Buffalo for New York City to pursue an acting career. By 1919, she had landed one of her first major roles in a London, England production of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. She played the part of Jo.

Her first major Broadway role came in 1921 as Sydney Fairfield, in *A Bill of Divorcement*. It played for 173 performances, well enough to be considered a hit. That was also the year that Katharine married.

Naturally, I selected the home of my heart as the place where I wanted to be married. My wedding to Guthrie McClintic took place in Cobourg, in the house where I had grown up, on September 8, 1921.

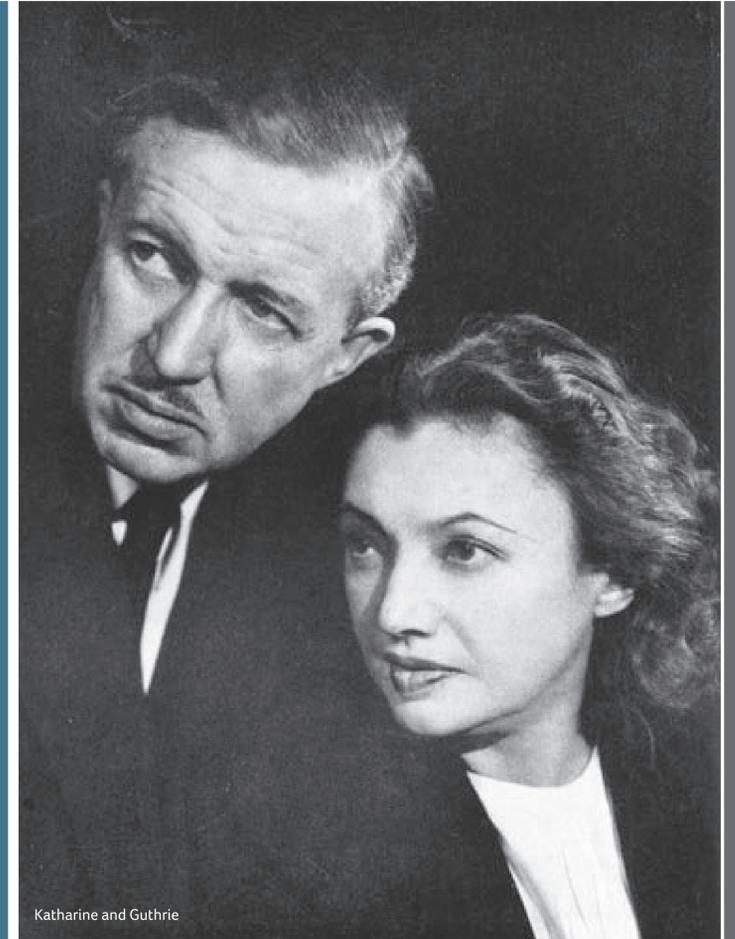


Cornell House – 139 Queen St.

That house was her aunt's summer home, which still stands there on the south-west corner of Queen and Green Streets and is known today as the Cornell House.

When patrons began exiting live theatre for movie houses, Katharine resolved to continue to support live theatre through action. **She rejected a number of attractive screen roles** where the actress who did accept went on to win an Academy Award.

Cobourg is the place of happy memories.



Katharine and Guthrie

Katharine appeared in only one Hollywood film, *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), in which she played herself. In 1954 however, she did narrate the film, *The Unconquered*, the life story of her friend **Helen Keller**.



*“She walks with a panther’s grace.
And she dies magnificently.”*

This review of Katharine’s portrayal of Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra provides a clear picture of her power.

*No actress playing Cleopatra can hope to realize in every scene the various Cleopatra’s that Shakespeare wrote. To be wanton and witty, lustful and regal, mischievous and sublime as the part demands that Cleopatra must be, is to ask the impossible away from the printed page. Yet Cornell succeeds in being all these things to an amazing degree. ... Vocally and in her person, she captures nearly all the changing moods of the chameleon. ... [S]he looks her loveliest. **She walks with a panther’s grace. And she dies magnificently.***

John Mason Brown

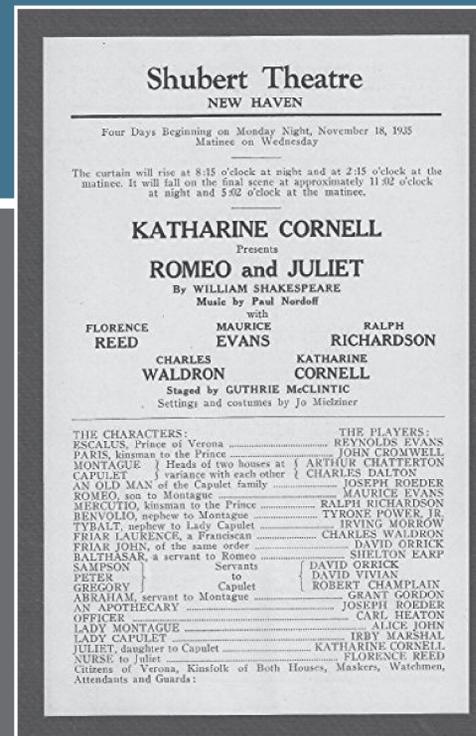
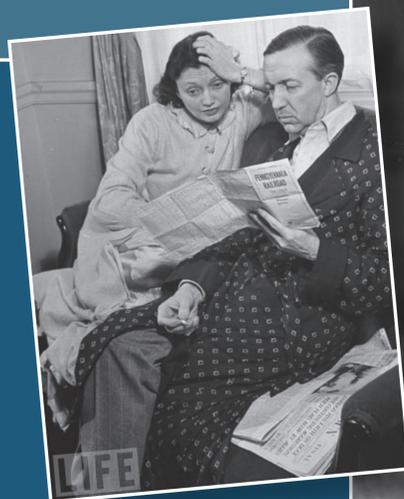
Guthrie McClintic died on October 29, 1961 shortly after the couple had celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. As he had always directed Katharine in every production since their marriage, **she decided to retire from the stage altogether.** She bought and restored an old building known as “*The Barn*” on Martha’s Vineyard in Tisbury, Massachusetts.

For her 80th birthday party in 1973, an assistant put together a tape of birthday greetings from actors with whom she had worked and had known. Remarkably, the tape runs for seven and a half hours.

Throughout her career, Cornell’s talent and drive earned her awards, honorary degrees, and other distinctions. In March 1937, Eleanor Roosevelt presented her with The Chi Omega Sorority’s **National Achievement Award** at a White House reception. She was one of the original members elected into the **American Theatre Hall of Fame** upon its establishment in 1972 and was one of three actresses awarded the first **Tony awards**. The Katharine Cornell–Guthrie McClintic Special Collections Reading Room is dedicated to the couple at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Katharine Cornell passed away on June 9, 1974 at *The Barn* at the age of 81.

McClintic and Cornell - Life Magazine



Katharine Cornell and Basil Rathbone as Romeo and Juliet

