

0 Comments

- [Print](#)
- [Reprint or License](#)
- [Share](#)

## Memories of a coach to the stars

Michael J. Solender likes this. [Unlike](#)

By Michael J. Solender  
Special Correspondent  
Posted: Sunday, Mar. 06, 2011  
Slideshow

« [Prev](#) 1 of 2 [Next](#) »



Charlton Heston confers with Charles Hadley during the three parts miniseries "Chiefs."



Charles Hadley, 83, retired as a professor at Queens University after more than 50 years. As a dialect coach, he has worked with many famous actors, and Queens has set up a special room in its library to hold his memorabilia. PHOTOS BY John D. Simmons - [jsimmons@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:jsimmons@charlotteobserver.com)

[Buy Photo](#) | [Store](#)

### More Information

- [For information](#)

Read about the Charles O. Hadley Reading Room and collection at Queens University of Charlotte at [www.queens.edu/Everett-Library/Other-Collections/Dr-Charles-Hadley-Collection.html](http://www.queens.edu/Everett-Library/Other-Collections/Dr-Charles-Hadley-Collection.html)

The Charles O. Hadley reading room in the Everett Library on the Queens University of Charlotte campus offers students and visitors comfortable sanctuary for reflection and study.

Just don't expect to be surrounded by silence in the cozy enclave.

Though the space and library are absent of noise and disturbance in the traditional sense, the room loudly resonates with story after story from the the career and life of its namesake.

Open to students and visitors, the room plays host to photos and memorabilia documenting Hadley's 50-year affiliation with Queens and his even lengthier association with Hollywood A-list stars as a dialect and voice coach specializing in regional southern speech.

Hadley amassed such a phenomenal collection of movie scripts, inscribed photos, personal correspondence, books and other keepsake collectables that when he retired from Queens in 2006, librarian Carol Jordan encouraged him to maintain the collection in the specially designated reading room as a legacy to be shared with generations to come.

Upon entering the space, visitors are immediately taken by the photos lining the walls.

Vivien Leigh smiles from an inscribed black-and-white photo acknowledging Hadley's assistance with her Blanche Dubois portrayal in the 1950 West End London performance of the classic, "A Streetcar Named Desire."

A photo of actress Faye Dunaway rests near one of Richard Widmark, both who worked with Hadley in the 1989 film, "Cold Sassy Tree."

A framed postcard from the American playwright Thornton Wilder provides his regrets at not being healthy enough to appear as promised in a Hadley directed Queens' production of Wilder's play "Our Town."

Charlton Heston, Nick Nolte, John Travolta, Scarlett Johansson, Jason Robards and Rue McClanahan are just a handful of the stars who have worked with over the years, each leaving personalized notes to their friend and coach.

No star looms larger than Hadley himself however, and at 83, the Statesville native and longtime Myers Park resident still holds court on occasion at Queens, where he is peppered with a stream of well-wishers dropping by to say hello.

"I'm so pleased that Queens has made such a splendid home for this collection," said Hadley. "It truly represents my life's work and upon retirement, I didn't have room for it in my home."

Hadley came to Queens in 1954, several years after graduating from Davidson College, directly from Europe, where he studied on a Fulbright scholarship.

It wasn't long before Hadley became a student favorite and his Sounds of American English class quickly became the most talked-about class on campus, always filling up.

"What I offered was a study of the sounds of general American English, a phrase many linguistic professionals are loathe to use," said Hadley.

"There is, in fact, a recognizable standard that is emulated by radio announcers and television broadcasters," said Hadley, citing network newscasters Diane Sawyer and Brian Williams as two of the most recognizable examples of the "best and clearest speakers of general American English."

"Southerners tend to splatter their vowels," said Hadley, referring to drawn-out soft drawl that is not uncommon in this region of the country. "In my class, we used the International Phonetic Alphabet and reviewed vowels, consonants and diphthongs, a complex speech sound or glide that begins with one vowel and gradually changes to another vowel within the same syllable, as in hour."

According to Hadley there are dozens of varying southern accents, and geography plays only part of the role in determining the precise dialect.

"When I was asked to work with the actors in the TV mini-series, 'Chiefs,' with Charlton Heston, Danny Glover, Paul Sorvino, Keith Carradine, Wayne Rogers, Tess Harper and Brad Davis, the director told me the setting was South Carolina and he wanted a dialect specific to there," Hadley recalled.

"I explained that there are considerable differences in dialect unique to the coast, Charleston, the piedmont, low country and Gullah," Hadley said.

He began to get flustered, telling me, "Chester, they are from Chester." I then explained that education and income would also impact the dialect.

What began as a chance response to a posting on a bulletin board in London in 1950 seeking a native English speaker, preferably from the southern United States, to work with Vivien Leigh on "Streetcar," launched an elite career that relied solely on word-of-mouth recommendations.

"I never had an agent or representation," said Hadley. "Filmmakers and actors work with me because they want my services and respect the approach I take."

Hadley said he coaches actors one-on-one and is on the set for each scene. "I don't have the authority to call 'cut' but after the cameras stop rolling, I can and do approach the actors and instruct them how they may enhance their dialect in an upcoming take."

While Hadley retired from Queens five years ago, he still is open to film, stage and television projects. He and his wife, Jane, often travel to New York to take in the theater and enjoy the work of former students.

"My wife, Jane, is a professor of drama and English at Queens and has directed more than 200 plays in Charlotte. Theater is a shared joy in our home," said Hadley.

Hadley has a list of accolades and teaching awards that would be the envy of any professor. He was named N.C. teacher of the year in 1999 and received the Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award that same year.

When asked about the recognition, Hadley said he was most pleased that his students felt they learned from him and that he was an effective educator.

As he looked around the room that bears his name, he took pains to point out and brag on some of his lesser-known students. His eyes gleaming, he appeared most content to remember his students and the special relationship he enjoyed with them.

With this living history on display at Queens, they'll be able to return the favor for years to come.

Michael J. Solender is a Charlotte-based freelance writer.

 [Subscribe to The Charlotte Observer.](#)

Michael J. Solender likes this. [Unlike](#)

This affects comments on all stories.

The Charlotte Observer welcomes your comments on news of the day. The more voices engaged in conversation, the better for us all, but do keep it civil. Please refrain from profanity, obscenity, spam, name-calling or attacking others for their views. [Read more](#)

**Add New Comment**

[Logout](#)

 Type your comment here.

Real-time updating is **enabled**. [\(Pause\)](#)

**Showing 0 comments**

[M](#) [Subscribe by email](#) [S](#) [RSS](#)