Guide to the Harry Leon Wilson Papers, ca. 1879-1939

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Note
Arts and Humanities --LiteratureHistory --History, CaliforniaGeographical (By Place) --California
Guide to the Harry Leon Wilson Papers, [ca. 1879-1939]

Collection number: BANC MSS 71/17 c

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Collection Summary

Collection Title: Harry Leon Wilson Papers, [ca. 1879-1939]
Collection Number: BANC MSS 71/17 c
Creator: Wilson, Harry Leon, 1867-1939
Extent: Number of containers: 14 boxes, and 1 oversize folder
Repository: The Bancroft Library
Berkeley, California 94720-6000
Physical Location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.
Abstract: Includes correspondence; materials re his work for Hubert Howe Bancroft; manuscripts of short stories, articles, novels and plays; notes; scenarios for some of his novels; clippings; photographs; papers relating to property in Mexico and to the settlement of his estate.
Also included: correspondence and papers of his children, Leon and Charis, relating mainly to the settlement of their father's estate.
Languages Represented: English
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Photographs transferred to the Pictorial Collections of The Bancroft Library (Album classified as BANC PIC 1971.023--ALB; Stage settings and scenes for Harry Leon Wilson's Bohemian Grove play, entitled Life, classified as BANC PIC 1971.024.1-9--PIC)

Scope and Content
Born in Oregon, Illinois on May 1, 1867, Harry Leon Wilson, the famed American humorist and author, grew up in the small town where his father owned a newspaper, and at an early age learned to set type. He quit school when he was sixteen, having studied shorthand and acquired secretarial skills. In November 1884, Wilson served as stenographer first in the Omaha offices of the Union Pacific Railroad, and a year later in Denver. This position he left in December 1885 to become secretary to Edwin Fowler of the Bancroft History Company, working for over a year in Colorado, collecting reminiscences of pioneer settlers and drumming up subscriptions for the Bancroft histories.

During this period, Wilson wrote "The Elusive Dollar Bill", a story based on his attempts to obtain a dollar bill for a silver piece in Denver, which was accepted in December 1886 by Puck, one of the foremost humor magazines in America.

It was at this time, too, that Wilson first met a young girl named Wilbertine Nesselrode Teters whom he was to marry in 1899. Wilson, still in the employ of the Bancroft Company, arrived in California in the early summer of 1887 to work on The Builders of the Commonwealth in San Francisco and later in Los Angeles.

By July of 1889, Wilson returned to Omaha, again as secretary to a Union Pacific Railroad official, Chief Engineer Virgil G. Brogue. In his spare time he wrote for Puck, assiduously studying the magazine's contents for style, especially the work of its prominent editor, Henry Cuyler Bunner, who, in 1892, offered him a position as assistant editor in New York. Wilson's duties consisted in selecting jokes and writing stories and editorials, under his own name as well as under pseudonyms or anonymously, until the death of Bunner, when he became the editor. Here he published his first collection of short stories, entitled Zigzag Tales in 1894.

However, his longing to leave New York and move to the West, led him to write his first novel, The Spenders. The two thousand dollar advance on the book enabled him to quit his job, marry Rose O'Neill who had illustrated it, and move to her sprawling fifteen room house, Bonniebrook, in the Ozarks, where he wrote his next three books. He traveled, however, to Colorado and to Salt Lake City to research his Lions of the Lord (1903), described as the first legitimate use of the Mormon adventure in fiction. It was followed by his controversial novel The Seeker (1904), and a nostalgic humorous evocation of a little midwestern town, The Boss of Little Arcady (1905).

Wilson first met Booth Tarkington in 1904. Both families sailed for Capri in September 1905, thus beginning the long association between the two writers. The draft of the first of many plays, The Man From Home, was completed in Paris in 1906. While in Europe, Wilson separated from Rose O'Neill, and published an unsuccessful novel, Ewing's Lady (1907).

Upon Wilson's return to America, he settled in California in the Carmel area. Here he met Helen Cooke whom he married in 1912, and by whom he had two children, Harry Leon Jr., and Helen Charis. Here he remained, with the exception of a visit to the South Seas in 1923, and a few years spent in Portland, Oregon after his separation from Helen. These were productive years, with short stories and serials appearing in the Saturday Evening Post from 1912, and many novels, beginning with Bunker Bean in 1913, and Ruggles of Red Gap in 1915. An offshoot of the Ruggles book were the stories centered around Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill, some of which were assembled and published under the title of Ma Pettengill in 1919, and were to continue to appear in the Post throughout his lifetime.

A stint in Hollywood provided the background for Merton of the Movies, which came out in 1922. While in Oregon, he wrote Lone Tree.

Upon his return to Carmel in 1929, he led a more or less solitary life. An automobile accident in June 1932 in Monterey affected his eyesight and sometimes his memory, and his last years were plagued by ill health. He continued to write, however. His last work, When in the Course, was refused by the Post. He continued to rework it until his death, and it was published posthumously by his children. He died quietly in his sleep in Carmel, on June 29, 1939.
His papers were a gift to the Library, August-December, 1970, from his children, Leon and Charis Wilson. The correspondence reflects his association with other authors, particularly Booth Tarkington. Also included in the collection are manuscripts and tear sheets of his articles and short stories; manuscripts of two of his novels, and of his plays; scenarios for dramatizations of some of his works; notes; clippings; some materials relating to his association with H. H. Bancroft; documents concerning the settlement of his estate; and photographs. There is also one box of papers of Leon and Charis Wilson, mainly relating to the settlement of their father’s estate. Some printed items, including inscribed copies of The Boss of Little Arcady, Bunker Bean, Lone Tree and the Zigzag Tales, have been removed for separate cataloging. Many photographs have also been removed to the Portrait Collection.

Box 1
Letters written by Wilson, 1879-1938, arranged chronologically.

Boxes 2-4
Letters to Wilson, arranged alphabetically by author or organization.

Additional Note
A partial list of correspondents follows the Key to Arrangement. Unlisted letters are arranged alphabetically in miscellanies.

Box 5
Correspondence and papers of Leon and Charis Wilson, mainly relating to the settlement of their father’s estate. Included are outgoing letters of Charis Wilson, 1938-1950; outgoing letters of Leon Wilson, 1940-1954; letters received by them; correspondence and papers relating to Wilson vs. Metz, 1938-1950; correspondence and papers relating to property of Francis H. Wilson, 1911-1954; and notes by Leon and Charis Wilson relating to their father.

Box 6
Manuscripts and/or tear sheets of articles and short stories by Harry Leon Wilson, arranged alphabetically by title:

- A.D.V.
- Adventures in Geography
- An Amateur Santa Claus
- The Artistic Temperament
- Author of “Ruggles” Interviews Himself
- Be Yourself
- The Blessed Miracle of Celestine
- The Bogie Men of Mulberry Bend
- Comedy
- Cousin Egbert Laissez Faires
- Dinner Is Now Served
- Does Character Drawing or Plot Count More in Fiction?
- Editorials for Puck
- The Evils of Smoking
- A Fabulous Fable
- The Fate of a Christmas Doll
- Film-Flam
- Flora and Fauna
- Frowzy Soars and Flops
- Gentle Annie
- The Green Land
- A Harrowing Dedication
- Help!
- Here’s How!
- An Interview—or Something
- Ma Pettengill Arbitrates
- Ma Pettengill Mixes
- The Major’s Lapse
- Money, Money, Money!
- Moral
- My Country Right and Wrong
- Naughty Boys!  

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Key to Arrangement

Poor Old Euclid
The Prince Orlando
"The Professor's Love Story"
The Realists
The Resurrection of Little Pete
The Sage Hen's Samson
"Snake Taming"
Some Merits and Defects of the American Novel
Somebody's Grandmother
Stranger
Sunny Crime Land
The Two Bad Men

Untitled manuscripts and fragments
Clippings from Puck

Box 7
The Boss of Little Arcady - holograph manuscript

Box 8
When in the Course - revised typescript

Box 9
Manuscripts of plays, some in collaboration with Booth Tarkington

The Antiquity Shop - alternate title: Tweedles (with Booth Tarkington)
George Washington Silver - final title: Up from Nowhere (with Booth Tarkington)
The Gibson Upright (with Booth Tarkington)
A Stranger from Stratford
Youth Will Be Served

Scenarios and dramatizations of works by Wilson

Bunker Bean, adapted by Lee Wilson Dodd
Ma Pettengill, adapted by Lilian Saunders
Merton of the Movies. (Lacks Act I)
Ruggles of Red Gap, adapted by Ralph Herz; another, by Harrison Rhodes and Mable Auldyn; another, mimeographed 1956?

Boxes 10-12
Unsorted notes - scraps of dialog, phrases, story plots, etc.

Box 13
Materials relating to H. L. Wilson's work for H. H. Bancroft, including revised typescripts of articles and dictations

The History and Study of History
The Historical Works of H. H. Bancroft (dictation of Mr. B. B. Barney)
Dictation of Judge D. M. Adams
Southern California
Biography of Judge R. M. Widney

Scrapbook re Merton of the Movies
Doubleday, Page & Co. - Memoranda of agreements with H. L. Wilson, 1904-1921
Documents relating to the settlement of the estate of Harry Leon Wilson, 1939-1942. Include copy of will made in 1929.
Miscellaneous snapshots of Capri, Italy and Africa, Nova Scotia, Oregon, Illinois; family portraits; unidentified material. Transferred to Picture Collection.

Box 14
Clippings, including reviews of Wilson's books, clippings about him, etc.
Accounts, 1898-1937
Bohemian Club
Calling cards
Compañía Minera Nuevo Mexico stock certificates, 1925
Membership cards and passes
Papers re trip to Orient, 1923
Pedigrees for dogs
Poems, not by Wilson
Publicity or materials re Wilson's books

oversize-portfolio Oversize
Blowups used in the Bancroft Library exhibit on Wilson (Booth Tarkington drawing, Booth Tarkington letter, cover of Ruggles)
Adams, Andy, 1859-1935
   Letter, Sept. 26, 1903.
Adams, Franklin Pierce, 1881-
   Letter, Nov. 4, n.y., with clippings. Addressed to Mr. Booth.
Aug, Edna
   5 letters, 1935-1937.
Beer, Thomas, 1849-1940
   3 letters, 1922-1923.
Berkowitz, Walter J., 1892-
   Letter, Nov. 25, 1936.
Blythe, Samuel George, 1868-
   4 letters, 1917-1929.
Bobbs-Merrill Company
Bouton, Stephen Miles, 1876-
   Letter, June 13, 1933.
Bradford, George F.
   Letter, Aug. 15, 1931, with annotation by Wilson.
Bucher, William Henry, 1874-1934
   Letter, Mar. 29, 1933, addressed to Zilpha Riley.
Burton, Richard Eugene, 1861-
   Letter, Sept. 16, [1935].
Clemens, Cyril, 1902-2
   2 letters, 1935-1938.
Clemens, Samuel Langhorn, 1835-1910
   2 letters, 1902, re H. L. Wilson's The Spenders.
Connelly, Laurel Louise (Fletcher) Tarkington (Mrs. Willard Connelly)
   2 letters, 1938. (The first Mrs. Booth Tarkington)
Croy, Homer, 1883-
   2 letters, [1934].
Curran, Henry Hastings, 1877-
   Letter, Mar. 13, [1937].
Curtis, Wardon Allan, 1867-1940
   Letter, July 16, 1899, re Puck.
Curtis Brown, Ltd.
Dale, Mary
   Letter, June 1, n.y., re H. L. Wilson, his first marriage and Rose O'Neill. Not addressed to H. L. Wilson.
Darrow, Whitney, 1881-
   see Players
Doubleday, Russell, 1872-
   see Doubleday, Doran and Company
Doubleday, Doran and Company
Duke, W. Dean, d. 1937
Field, Walter Taylor, 1861-
   Letter, July 16, 1938.
Fink, Albert
   Letter, Mar. 7, 1919.
Ford, Hugh
Ford, James Lauren, 1854-1928
   Letter, n.d.
Furnas, Clifford Cook, 1900-
   3 letters, 1937.
Garland, Hamlin, 1860-1940
   Letter, Sept. 8, 1904, re H. L. Wilson's *The Seeker*.
Gaylord, Harriet
   Letter, Dec. 30, n.y.
Gibson, William C.
   4 letters, 1886-1905. 1886 letter written while editor of *Puck*.
Gregory, Warren Fенно, 1863-1936
   see Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company
Hale, Ralph Tracy, 1880-
   see Bobbs-Merrill Company
Hereford, Frances (Reynolds) (Mrs. William Richard Hereford)
   Letter, Jan. 7, 1930.
Howells, William Dean, 1837-1920
   2 letters, 1902-1918.
Ingersoll, Robert Green, 1833-1899
   Letter, Feb. 18, 1893.
Kinsey, H. C.
   8 letters, 1930-1939. Agent and publisher.
   See also 2 letters, 1940, to Leon Wilson in Box 5.
Klyce, Scudder
Knapp, Clarence Hollister, 1879-
   Letter, May 26, 1934, with typescript of two of his ballads.
Knutsford, Sydney Holland, Viscount, 1855-
La Shelle, Kirke, 1862-1905
   Letter, Dec. 1, 1903.
London, Jack, 1876-1916
   Letter, Oct. 29, 1912.
Long, Ray, 1878-1935
Lorimer, George Horace, 1868-1937
Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company, Boston
McIntyre, Oscar Odd, 1884-
   3 letters, 1935 and n.d.
Matthews, James Brander, 1852-1929
   Letter, July 13, 1893.
Mencken, Henry Louis, 1880-1956
   26 letters, 1911-1937, re Dreiser, Conrad and other writers, and re his editorship and
   association with *Smart Set*.
   See also 2 letters, 1939-1942, to Leon Wilson in Box 5.
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation
   Letter, June 3, 1935, by Harry Rapf, enclosing copy of the studio's synopsis of "Ma
   Pettengill".
Milburn, George, 1906-1966
   4 letters, 1934-1935. Letters, Apr. 30 and June 15, 1935 are incomplete.
Miller, Agnes May (Wilson), 1854-1944 (Mrs. Charles L. Miller)
   See also letters to Charis & Leon Wilson in Box 5.
Moll, Grace (Mrs. Carl Moll)
6 letters, 1938-1939. Hospital nurse, source of hospital details in H. L. Wilson's *Lone Tree*.

Newell, Robert C.
Letter, Feb. 26, 1924.

O'Neill, Callista, d. 1946
See also 3 letters to Charis and Leon Wilson in Box 5.

O'Neill, Rose Cecil, 1874-1944
9 letters, 1935-1938. 1921 exhibit catalog and a sketchbook also included.
See also 3 letters to Charis and Leon Wilson in Box 5.

Parkhill, Forbes, 1892-
Letter, Dec. 9, 1937.

Pinkerton, Kathrene (Gedney) (Mrs. Robert E. Pinkerton)
10 letters, 1938-1939.

Pinkerton, Robert E, 1882-
2 letters, 1938-1939.

Players
Letter, May 18, 1938, by Whitney Darrow. With this, card admitting Wilson to the
Club for two weeks, Oct. 31, 1904.
See also 2 letters to Charis Wilson, 1938, in Box 5.

Quinn, John, 1870-1924
Letter, Feb. 4, 1919, to Otto Carmichael.

Riley, Zilpha, 1893- (Mrs. Erven Riley)
4 letters, 1931-1939.
See also letters to Charis and Leon Wilson in Box 5.

Roberts, Kenneth Lewis, 1885-
Postcard, Mar. 12, 1920 and letter, n.d.

Roosevelt, Theodore, Pres. U.S., 1858-1919
3 letters, 1895-1902. 1895 letters, while President, New York City Police Department;
1902 letter, while President of the United States.

Runyon, Damon, 1884-
Letter, Oct. 31, 1933.

Sabin, Edwin Legrand, 1870-
2 letters, 1937.

*Saturday Evening Post*
4 letters, 1937, by Wesley Winans Stout.

Smith, Irving G.
3 letters, 1916-1924, re Tahiti

Soothern, Edward Hugh, 1859-
Letter, July 18, 1916.

Soothern, Julia (Marlowe) (Mrs. Edward Hugh Soothern)
Letter, July 18, 1916.

Stevens, James Floyd, 1892-
7 letters, 1926-1931.
See also letter to George Kummer in Box 5.

Stout, Wesley Winans, 1890-
See *Saturday Evening Post*

Street, Julian, 1879-
11 letters, 1908-1939.

Strunk, William, 1869-
Postcard, [June 11, 1913]. Evidently one of several cards.

Sullivan, Frank, 1892-
3 letters, 1932-1937.

Tarkington, Booth, 1869-1946
115 letters, 1905-1939. Nov. 30, 1929 letter written for him by his wife, Susannah (Robinson) Tarkington. Three drawings by Tarkington, ca. 1906-1907, and undated account also included.

See also letters to Charis and Leon Wilson in Box 5.

Taylor, Bert Leston, 1866-
Letter, Nov. 30, 1904.

Treadwell, Sophie

Tyler, George Crouse, 1867-
5 letters, 1923-1935.

Untermeyer, Louis, 1885-

Vaughan, George, 1873-

Weeks, Edward Augustus, 1898-

Welch, Charles Buckley, 1883-
3 letters, 1929-1939.

Wells, Herbert George, 1866-1946
3 letters, 1904?-1913.

Wiley, Hugh, 1884-
4 letters, 1921-1922. Signed "Wildcat".

Wilson, Adeline Sheldon (Kidder), 1832-1914 (Mrs. Samuel Wilson)

Wilson, J. C.
4 letters, 1926, re mining in Tonichi, Sonora, Mexico. Copies.

Wilson, Leon

See also letters written by Leon Wilson in Box 5.

Wilson, Leonard, 1869-
Letter, June 15, 1917.

Wilson, Lester Sheldon, 1856-1944

Wright, Ernest Hunter, 1882-
Letter, Nov. 6, 1936.

Bennett, Raine

Cooke, Grace (MacGowan), 1863-1944
3 letters, 1940, re revision of When in the Course.

Corle, Edwin, 1906-1956
Letter, Aug. 10, 1939

Curtis Publishing Company
Letter, May 23, 1938, by Walter C. Turner, re payments made by the Company to H. L. Wilson from 1925 to 1934.

Kinsey, H. C.
2 letters, 1940, re posthumous publication of When in the Course.

McCanse, Ralph Alan
3 letters, 1954, re his proposed biography of Rose O’Neill.

Mencken, Henry Louis, 1880-1956
2 letters, 1939-1942.

Mexico. Consulado, San Francisco
Letter, Apr. 16, 1938, by Héctor M. Escalona, re title to land in Mexico belonging to H. W. Wilson.

Miller, Agnes May (Wilson), 1854-1944
2 letters, 1939-1940. 1940 letter contains information re H. L. Wilson.

O'Neill, Calista, d. 1946
3 letters, 1939 and n.d., concerning the Frances Wilson property in Missouri.

O'Neill, Lottie

O'Neill, Paul E., 1900-

O'Neill, Rose Cecil, 1874-1944
3 letters, 1938-1939. Letter, Apr. 13, 1938, includes snapshots of Rose O'Neill. Also included, photograph of Little Arcady, a cottage in Mountain View, New Jersey.

Players

Riley, Zilpha, 1893-1896 (Mrs. Erven Riley)

Stevens, James Floyd, 1892-

Street, Marguerite (Skibeness) (Mrs. Julian Street)

Tarkington, Booth, 1869-1946
11 letters, 1936-1944. Letter, June 30, 1939, is a transcript.

U.S. Consulate, Mazatlán, Mexico
3 letters, 1938, by Rufus H. Lane, Jr., re H. L. Wilson's title to property in the Hacienda del Palmito de Verde.

U.S. Consulate, Nogales, Mexico
2 letters, 1938, by Thomas M. Powell, re H. L. Wilson's stock in the Compaqia Minera Nuevo Mixico.

Walker, Franklin Dickerson, 1900-

Wilson, Gertrude

Woodress, James Leslie, 1916-
Letter, July 9, 1954.