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

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Note

Arts and Humanities --LiteratureHistory --History, CaliforniaGeographical (By Place) --California

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Collection number: BANC MSS 71/17 c

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Collection Summary

Collection Title: Harry Leon Wilson Papers,

Date (inclusive): [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

Access

Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation

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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!

	<p>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</p>
Box 7	<p>Untitled manuscripts and fragments Clippings from <i>Puck</i> <i>The Boss of Little Arcady</i> - holograph manuscript</p>
Box 8	<p><i>When in the Course</i> - revised typescript</p>
Box 9	<p>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</p>
Boxes 10-12	<p>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 Auldryn; another, mimeographed 1956?</p>
Box 13	<p>Unsorted notes - scraps of dialog, phrases, story plots, etc. 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</p>
	<p>Scrapbook re <i>Merton of the Movies</i> Doubleday, Page & Co. - Memoranda of agreements with H. L. Wilson, 1904-1921 Papers relating to Harry Leon Wilson's property in the Hacienda de Palmito de Verde, Mexico. Include book of photographs; deed, 1917 (in Spanish and an English translation). 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.</p>
Box 14	<p>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</p>
oversize-portfolio portfolio	<p>Blowups used in the Bancroft Library exhibit on Wilson (Booth Tarkington drawing, Booth Tarkington letter, cover of <i>Ruggles</i>)</p>

- 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**
Letter, Dec. 23, 1904, by Ralph T. Hale.
- 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 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.**
Letter, July 16, 1915, re British edition of *Ruggles of Red Gap*.
- 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**
2 letters, 1904-1935. 1935 letter written by Russell Doubleday.
- Duke, W. Dean, d. 1937**
8 letters, 1915-1935. Longtime friend and cattle rancher, source of story material for H. L. Wilson. Also included, promissory note, Feb. 23, 1929 and 2 letters from his wife, Dita, 1936-1937.
- Field, Walter Taylor, 1861-**
Letter, July 16, 1938.
- Fink, Albert**
Letter, Mar. 7, 1919.
- Ford, Hugh**
Letter, June 23, 1935.

- 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 Fenno, 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**
Letter, Aug. 30, 1923.
- Knapp, Clarence Hollister, 1879-**
Letter, May 26, 1934, with typescript of two of his ballads.
- Knutsford, Sydney Holland, Viscount, 1855-**
Letter, Feb. 14, 1929.
- La Shelle, Kirke, 1862-1905**
Letter, Dec. 1, 1903.
- London, Jack, 1876-1916**
Letter, Oct. 29, 1912.
- Long, Ray, 1878-1935**
Letter, n.d. Transcript, by Zilpha Riley.
- Lorimer, George Horace, 1868-1937**
Letter, n.d. Incomplete.
- Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company, Boston**
3 letters, 1904-1905, by W. F. Gregory. Publishers of *The Boss of Little Arcady*.
- 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)**
22 letters, 1914-1939. H. L. Wilson's sister. Letter, Oct. 6, 1938, is incomplete.
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**
Letter, Dec. 8, 1937, to Louis Tarkington, re Rose O'Neill.
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
- Sothorn, Edward Hugh, 1859-**
Letter, July 18, 1916.
- Sothorn, Julia (Marlowe) (Mrs. Edward Hugh Sothorn)**
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

Letter, May 14, 1935.

Tyler, George Crouse, 1867-

5 letters, 1923-1935.

Untermeyer, Louis, 1885-

Letter, Jan. 31, 1915.

Vaughan, George, 1873-

Letter, Dec. 10, 1937.

Weeks, Edward Augustus, 1898-

Letter, May 27, 1935.

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)

Letter, Apr. 25, [1898]. H. L. Wilson's mother. Xerox copy of letter to her daughter, Agnes May (Wilson) Miller.

Wilson, J. C.

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

Wilson, Leon

Letter, n.d. His son.

See also letters written by Leon Wilson in Box 5.

Wilson, Leonard, 1869-

Letter, June 15, 1917.

Wilson, Lester Sheldon, 1856-1944

11 letters, 1907-1938. Brother of H. L. Wilson.

Wright, Ernest Hunter, 1882-

Letter, Nov. 6, 1936.

Bennett, Raine

Letter, Mar. 5, 1953, re Carmel and H. L. Wilson.

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, Callista, d. 1946**
3 letters, 1939 and n.d., concerning the Frances Wilson property in Missouri.
- O'Neill, Lottie**
4 letters, 1947, relating to the Frances Wilson property and to Rose O'Neill and H. L. Wilson.
- O'Neill, Paul E., 1900-**
5 letters, 1946-1947, re the family and the Frances Wilson property. Nephew of Callista and Rose O'Neill.
- 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**
2 letters, 1938, by Whitney Darrow. With this, copy of the Players' Bulletin, Nov. 1, 1939, containing obituary for H. L. Wilson.
- Riley, Zilpha, 1893- (Mrs. Erven Riley)**
8 letters, 1941-1961. Contains information concerning H. L. Wilson. Enclosure to letter to George Kummer, May 13, 1957, transcripts of letters from Wilson to Mrs. Riley.
- Stevens, James Floyd, 1892-**
Letter, [1959]. Transcript of letter to George Kummer, re H. L. Wilson; presumably sent to Leon Wilson.
- Street, Marguerite (Skibeness) (Mrs. Julian Street)**
2 letters, 1950-1958. Contain copies of H. L. Wilson's letters to 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 Compañia Minera Nuevo Mexico.
- Walker, Franklin Dickerson, 1900-**
Letter, Aug. 2, 1955.
- Wilson, Gertrude**
Letter, May 30, 1947, re O'Neill and Wilson families.
- Woodress, James Leslie, 1916-**
Letter, July 9, 1954.