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Guide to the Mina Kirstein Curtiss Papers

YCAL MSS 14



by Ellen Zak Danforth

July 1987

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 14

CREATOR: Curtiss, Mina Kirstein, 1896-1985

TITLE: Mina Kirstein Curtiss papers

DATES: 1917-1966 (inclusive)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.75 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of personal and professional correspondence.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.curtiss>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.curtiss>.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Mina Kirstein Curtiss Papers were donated to the The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library by Mina Curtiss in 1967, 1977, and 1980.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Mina Kirstein Curtiss Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Mina Kirstein Curtiss Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

MINA KIRSTEIN CURTISS (1896-1985)

Mina Kirstein Curtiss, author, editor, translator, and teacher was born in Boston on October 13, 1896. She received an A.B. degree from Smith College in 1918 and an A.M. from Columbia in 1920. She attained the rank of associate professor of English language and literature at Smith, where she taught from 1920 to 1933 and again from 1941 to 1944. In 1938 she was an instructor at the New School for Social Research.

In the 1930s Mrs. Curtiss collaborated with Orson Welles and John Houseman on scripts for the Mercury Theater of the Air in New York City. During World War II she served on Houseman's staff at the Office of War Information and edited a collection of letters from enlisted men and noncommissioned officers, *Letters Home* (1944).

Her published works include *Olive, Cypress and Palm: An Anthology of Love and Death* (1930), *The Midst of a Life: A Romance* (1933), and *Letters of Marcel Proust* (1949). She also wrote *Bizet and His World* (1958) and in 1978 published *Other People's Letters: A Memoir*.

In 1928 Mina Kirstein married Harry Tomlinson Curtiss, who died a year later. She had two brothers, Lincoln and George Kirstein. She died November 5, 1985, near her home in Weston, Connecticut.

Scope and Contents

The Mina Kirstein Curtiss Papers contain letters to her from well-known authors, poets, critics, and composers. The papers span the dates 1917-1966.

The papers consist of twenty-eight folders of alphabetically arranged correspondence. The letters are both personal and professional in character and frequently refer to Curtiss's publications.

The most personal of the letters were written by Franklin P. Adams and reveal a courtship that almost led to marriage. The letters from Louis Untermeyer, however, have a mentor quality. He criticizes her writing, accepts some of it for publication in the literary journal *The Seven Arts*, and acts as an intermediary in the publication of her first book, *Olive, Cypress and Palm: An Anthology of Love and Death* (1930), a selection of works by other poets.

The Alice B. Toklas letters refer to visits and historical research associated with the writing of *Letters of Marcel Proust* (1949), and Virgil Thomson's letters mention his collaboration with Mina on *Bizet and His World* (1958) and chronicle the friendship between Toklas and Curtiss. An interesting passage in the Toklas letter of June 18, 1949, illustrates the gentle candor with which Alice writes of others: "Virgil has taken his success quietly and gently--which in him is almost unnatural. It is . . . beyond anything one would have expected from the young Virgil who showed sweetness and light only in his music." Thomson's letters are equally revealing. On August 25, 1950 he writes to Mina, "I feel wonderful and have been as usual a success."

Professional and personal matters also overlap in the letters of Carl Van Vechten, Aline Bernstein, and Archibald MacLeish. In MacLeish's letter of October 29, 1929, he encloses a poem written after the sudden death of Mina's husband. Aline Bernstein's letters discuss, among other things, their mutual interest in the

theater. Carl Van Vechten helped Mina bring one of her protégés, poet Hugh K. Johnson, to the attention of Langston Hughes.

Also included in the correspondence are letters from William Bullitt, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Edmund Wilson, and Glenway Wescott. These letters mention Curtiss's writings, allude to friendships, and discuss various social events. The collection also includes an undated Christmas card from Thomas Wolfe and a letter of appreciation from Alger Hiss.

Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1-3	Adams, Franklin P.	1921-42, n.d.
b. 1, f. 4-6	Bernstein, Aline	1928-50
b. 1, f. 7	Bullitt, William	1933-44
b. 1, f. 8	Copland, Aaron	1950, 1954
b. 1, f. 8	Eliot, T. S.	1932 Dec 16
b. 1, f. 9	Hammarskjöld, Dag	1959 Oct 26
b. 1, f. 9	Hiss, Alger	1949 Oct 17
b. 1, f. 9	Hughes, Langston	1942 Apr 27
b. 1, f. 10	Hurd, Peter	1935, 1940
b. 1, f. 11	Johnson, Hugh K.	1945-52, n.d.
b. 1, f. 11	Levy, Harriet	1941
b. 1, f. 12-13	MacLeish, Archibald	1929-62, n.d.
b. 1, f. 14	March, William	1938 Jul 17
b. 1, f. 14	Moore, Marianne	1954-66
b. 1, f. 15	Sacco, Dante	1944 Feb 6
b. 1, f. 15	Tchelitchew, Pavel	1945
b. 1, f. 16-19	Thomson, Virgil	1941-62, n.d.
b. 2, f. 20-22	Toklas, Alice B.	1948-56
b. 2, f. 23-24	Untermeyer, Louis	1917-29
b. 2, f. 25-26	Van Vechten, Carl	1928-60, n.d.
b. 2, f. 27	Wescott, Glenway	1934-45
b. 2, f. 28	Wilson, Edmund	1945, 1946
b. 2, f. 28	Wolfe, Thomas	n.d.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Composers
Literature -- History and criticism
Music -- History and criticism
Poetry -- History and criticism
Theater -- Production and direction

Occupations

Authors
Poets

Names

Adams, Franklin P. (Franklin Pierce), 1881-1960
Bernstein, Aline, 1881-1955
Curtiss, Mina Kirstein, 1896-1985
Johnson, Hugh K.
MacLeish, Archibald, 1892-1982
Thomson, Virgil, 1896-1989
Toklas, Alice B., 1877-1967
Untermeyer, Louis, 1885-1977
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964
Wescott, Glenway, 1901-1987