

Guide to the Sandburg-Page Papers

YCAL MSS 19



by Ellen Zak Danforth

August 1987

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 19

CREATOR: Sandburg, Carl, 1878-1967

TITLE: Sandburg-Page papers

DATES: 1924-1947 (inclusive)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.75 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of letters, poems, writings, and memorabilia from Sandburg to Helen Hope Page and other Page papers, mostly concerning composer Henry Cowell.

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

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.sandbrg>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Sandburg-Page Papers were purchased in 1970 from Mrs. Page's estate with income from the George Buell Alvord Fund.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Sandburg-Page 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

Sandburg-Page Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Newspaper clippings in folders 1 and 8 were formerly restricted fragile; finding aid updated in 2018.

Scope and Contents

From age fifty-six to sixty-nine, Carl Sandburg, Pulitzer prize-winning poet, biographer, writer, and folklorist wrote to Helen Hope Page, a woman about whom almost nothing is known except that she lived in or near Oakdale California during the time that Sandburg corresponded with her. Lacking anything in Mrs. Page's hand, the papers document this correspondence which spans the dates 1934-47, with most of the material falling in 1938.

The papers are chronologically arranged in twenty-seven folders. Letters and telegrams, poems, various writings, and memorabilia sent by Carl Sandburg to Helen Hope Page are in the first twenty four folders. The last three folders contain other papers from Mrs. Page's estate, mostly material on composer Henry Cowell.

The correspondence documents the close friendship of Carl Sandburg and Helen Hope Page. Although Sandburg sent her copies of his Lincoln manuscripts for her review and approval, it is not clear whether Helen served Sandburg in any official capacity as editor of his work. She also received, before publication, some of Sandburg's poems. One, "Heartbreak Time," was sent in three different drafts between April 10 and 14, 1938.

Much of the correspondence is in the form of unpublished poem-letters and brief notes jotted down or typed on scraps of paper. Sandburg wrote on ticket stubs, newspaper articles, pictures, and other people's letters giving Helen snatches of his observations, opinions, or personal feelings. In a letter dated March 1, 1938, he "rewrites" one of Shakespeare's sonnets, and on July 2, 1938 he explains how he felt about what he had written concerning Lincoln's last night at Ford's Theater.

Although most of the correspondence refers to Sandburg's writing career, a number of the letters are personal in nature. Sandburg often used nicknames for himself and Helen, and telegrams are signed with various pseudonyms. The personal and semi-professional aspects of the friendship frequently overlap, as in one note of May 13, 1938, in which Sandburg refers to an episode in Lincoln's life to explain how Lincoln would have understood the loss of Helen's dog. It is written on a copy of a Lincoln manuscript.

There is little evidence that Sandburg and Helen met very often. Carl sent her his itineraries with memorabilia from his lectures and recitals and sometimes he mailed her programs and copies of his published speeches. The most affectionate letter is a telegram sent November 23, 1938 at the end of the most prolific period of correspondence.

The collection contains four letters from Henry Dixon Cowell to Helen Page, dated July 3, 1938, December 1, 1938, February 21, 1940, and June 1, 1940, found in folders 12, 16, and 19. They were written from San Quentin where Cowell was imprisoned on a morals charge in 1936. The letters discuss the various sources of pressure that led to his parole in 1940. He also mentions Olive, probably Olive Thompson Cowell, who

wrote the typescript on Henry's activities (folder 26). Folder twenty-five contains a biographical account of Henry's early life by his mother Clarissa Dixon Cowell, a woman who was pursuing a professional writing career at the same time she was encouraging her son's talents. The undated, unsigned typescript was written shortly before her death in 1916 and documents the prodigious beginnings of Henry Cowell's musical career.

Folder twenty-seven holds two typescript copies of letters written by Carl Sandburg to Gale Wilhelm, who was a live-in companion to Mrs. Page. Foldered with that material is a poem and a brief impression of Wilhelm that Sandburg wrote.

Collection Contents

Correspondence

| | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|
| b. 1, f. 1-2 | Correspondence | 1937 |
| b. 1, f. 3-16 | Correspondence | 1938 |
| b. 1, f. 17-18 | Correspondence | 1939 |
| b. 2, f. 19-21 | Correspondence | 1940 |
| b. 2, f. 22 | Correspondence | 1941 |
| b. 2, f. 23 | Correspondence | 1942-43 |
| b. 2, f. 24 | Correspondence | 1944-47 |

Other Papers

| | | |
|-------------|--|---------------|
| b. 2, f. 25 | Cowell, Clarissa Dixon: biographical writings on Henry Dixon Cowell | [1916?] |
| b. 2, f. 26 | Cowell, Olive Thompson: writings on Henry Dixon Cowell | 1934 Jun |
| b. 2, f. 27 | Wilhelm, Gale: typed copies of letters by Sandburg and writings on Wilhelm by Sandburg | 1940-41, 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

American poetry
Authors, American
Biography as a literary form
Poetry -- 20th Century -- History and criticism
Poets, American -- 20th Century

Occupations

Biographers -- United States
Poets

Names

Cowell, Clarissa
Cowell, Henry, 1897-1965
Page, Helen Hope
Sandburg, Carl, 1878-1967
Wilhelm, Gale, 1908-