

Duncan Emrich Autograph Album Collection

AFC 1955/001



American Folklife Center, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

August 1998

Encoded by Nora Yeh, 1998 ; Revised by
Nora Yeh

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/eadafc.af998001>

Latest revision: September 2009

Collection Summary

Call No.: AFC 1955/001

Creator: Emrich, Duncan, 1908-1977

Title: Duncan Emrich Autograph Album Collection

Inclusive Dates: 1843-1923

Contents: 20 volumes and 2 folders

Repository: Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: This collection was initiated through an on-air request for autograph albums on the "NBC Weekend" radio program by Duncan Emrich, then head of the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, between 1955 and 1956. It consists of twenty autograph albums and related ephemera. Eight of the albums are from Independence, Iowa; others are from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, and New York, with dates from 1843 to 1923. Some albums include photographs, drawings, and calligraphy.

Languages: Collection material in English, German, and Greek

Administrative Information

Provenance

Twenty autograph albums, dated from 1843 through 1923, represent the German-American and Anglo-American autograph album tradition. Duncan Emrich, head of the Archive of Folk Song, appeared on the "NBC Weekend" radio program and apparently asked interested listeners to send such materials to the Library. In response to his radio talk, the albums, mostly from Iowa, arrived at the Archive between 1955 and 1956. Examination of the Music Division administrative files might lead to further information on the original owners, donors, and the history of these albums.

Processing History

This collection was processed in 1995, with a finding aid completed in December 1995. It was revised in 1998.

Access

Access to the collection is unrestricted.

Restrictions

Duplication for publication may require permissions.

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.

Personal Names

Emrich, Duncan, 1908-1977, collector.

Organizations

American Folklife Center.

Archive of Folk Song (U.S.)

Subjects

American poetry--19th century.

American poetry--20th century.

Autograph albums--Iowa.
Autograph albums--Middle West.
Autograph albums--New York (State)
Autograph albums--United States.
Autograph verse.
British Americans--Iowa--Independence--Social life and customs.
German Americans--Iowa--Independence--Social life and customs.

Locations
Independence (Iowa)--Social life and customs.

Forms of Material
Autograph albums.
Drawings.
Photographs.
Poems.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of twenty autograph albums and ephemera from the states of Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, and New York dating from 1843 through 1923, collected by Duncan Emrich, head of the Archive of Folk Song, 1945-1956. Emrich's collection is comprised of eight albums from the Habel, Steinmetz, Hale, and Wehls families, donated by Mrs. Orville B. Craig of Independence, Iowa, in 1955; three albums apparently donated by Neva Ruth Dye of Independence, Iowa, in 1956; plus seven albums, one set of loose pages from an album, and one greeting card, donated by various individuals.

The collection represents German-American and Anglo-American autograph album customs. Autograph albums are thought to have become a tradition among German students in the fifteenth century. The tradition came to the United States about 1820 and changed as it was adopted by American album-writers (McNeil, 1968).

These albums, the earliest from 1843, provide examples of variations of the tradition as it emerged. Several albums kept as a student pastime (college men and women and school boys and girls) are found in this collection. Another album custom of the time was for women of marriageable age to keep "friendship books" to collect signatures and verses from suitors and advice (often on marriage) from visitors, friends, and relatives (Randolph and McCord, 1948). Many women continued adding to their albums after marriage. Several albums in this collection provide examples of this version of the tradition. Sometimes the same album contains examples of both the student and the pre-marriage tradition. The verse used in American autograph albums of this period varied from serious to light-hearted and humorous texts (Stern, 1973). The albums may include verses of somber advice from their elders alongside light-hearted verses from friends. The inscriptions include simple signatures, poetry, sayings, personal messages, quotations, calligraphy, and drawings. The language of the inscriptions is predominantly in English, with few in German or Greek.

Little information accompanies these albums. Sometimes the name of the original owner can be determined from the album, but in some cases only the first name is evident. Entries are often dated, so the period the album was in use can usually be determined. Donors did not always provide information about the original owner or the history of the album.

The albums are grouped by the principal donors, then arranged chronologically by the date of the first inscription. Mrs. Craig's donation of eight albums is followed by Mrs. Nye's donation of three albums. These are followed by the individually donated albums, album pages, and the greeting card, all arranged chronologically.

Further research might be done on this collection. Examination of the Music Division files might lead to further correspondence related to the albums under donor's names. The radio script was not found among the Duncan Emrich papers held by the Archive.

Bibliography

McNeil, W.K., "The Autograph Album Custom: A Tradition and its Scholarly Treatment." *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, Spring 1968, pp. 29-40.

Randolph, Vance, and May Kennedy McCord, "Autograph Albums in the Ozarks." *Journal of American Folklore* 61, no. 240 (April-June, 1948), pp. 182-93.

Stern, Stephen, "Autograph Memorabilia as an Output of Social Interaction." *New York Folklore Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (September 1973), pp. 219-39.

Description of Series

Container

Series

SERIES I: ADMINISTRATIVE MATERIALS

SERIES II: DONATIONS OF MRS. CRAIG

The following eight albums were donated by Mrs. Orville B. Craig. Albums from the same location and period were also donated by Mrs. Neva Ruth Dye, below.

Most of these albums have several entries from Independence, Iowa.

SERIES III: DONATIONS OF MRS. DYE

The following three albums were apparently donated by Neva Ruth Dye (Mrs. L. M. Dye) of Independence, Iowa. In a letter found with the collection, Mrs. Dye says she is donating "these albums" (more than one), but no albums are marked as having been donated by her. All the other albums, with the exception of the loose album pages, either have known donors or were marked as having been donated anonymously. So, it is likely that these three unmarked albums, all German-American and all with entries from Independence, Iowa, were donated by Mrs. Dye.

These albums are from the same location and period as the albums donated by Mrs. Craig and have many signatures in common with them.

SERIES IV: INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

Collection Inventory

Container

Contents

SERIES I: ADMINISTRATIVE MATERIALS

FOLDER 1

Collection Guide.

FOLDER 2

Correspondence and identifying information.

One letter from Neva Ruth Dye (Mrs. L. M. Dye) of Independence, Iowa, dated May 9, 1956. One letter from Mrs. Grace Danforth of Charleston, Missouri, dated March 27, 1955. Various envelopes and postmarks identifying donors, which were enclosed inside the albums by Dr. Emrich.

SERIES II: DONATIONS OF MRS. CRAIG

The following eight albums were donated by Mrs. Orville B. Craig. Albums from the same location and period were also donated by Mrs. Neva Ruth Dye, below.

Most of these albums have several entries from Independence, Iowa.

ITEM 1

Steinmetz, Carrie L. C., 1879

A 4 x 2.5-in. cardboard-bound album with illustrated cover. Earliest inscription dated September 29, 1879. The inner cover is inscribed, "Carrie L. C. Steinmetz." The earliest inscriptions are apparently for a young woman going away to school ("Study hard and accomplish much"). Inscriptions in English, with one in German.

ITEM 2

Hale, Fannie R., 1879

A 7.5 x 4.75-in. black leather-bound album embossed with gold and silver pheasant pattern and Chinese calligraphy on the spine, belonging to Fannie R. Hale. Earliest inscription dated October 25, 1879, and most inscriptions are from various towns in Iowa. Many calligraphic embellishments and illustrations throughout; most are apparently by Fannie Hale. Inscriptions in English.

ITEM 3

Wehls, Emma, 1880

A 7 x 4.25-in. blue cloth-bound album embossed with fan design in silver, black, and gold belonging to Emma Wehls. Earliest entry dated September 29, 1880. Inscriptions in English and German.

ITEM 4

Steinmetz, Martha, 1881

A 7.75 x 5-in. dark green album with raised and embossed stag head on the cover belonging to Miss Martha Steinmetz. Earliest entry dated December 23, 1881. Inscriptions in English and German.

ITEM 5

Habel, Johnnie, 1882

A 7 x 4-in. light brown, cloth-bound album embossed in silver and dark brown belonging to Johnnie [Johann?] Habel. Earliest entry from Chicago dated February 22, 1882. Inscriptions in English and German.

ITEM 6

Steinmetz, George, 1883

A 6 x 4-in. brown album with raised and embossed color illustrations of birds belonging to George Steinmetz. Earliest entry dated April 3, 1883. The penmanship of the signature of the owner indicates that the album belonged to a child. Color illustrations of butterflies inside. Inscriptions are primarily in English and German, with one inscription in Greek.

SERIES II: DONATIONS OF MRS. CRAIG

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- ITEM 7 [Steinmetz?], Martha, 1883
A 7 x 4.25-in. grey, cloth-bound album embossed in black and gold belonging to Martha [Steinmetz?]. Earliest entry dated August 10, 1883. Quotations from famous persons are printed in gold ink on left-hand pages. Inscriptions in English and German.
- ITEM 8 Steinmetz, Carrie, 1884
A 7 x 4.5-in. red velvet album belonging to Miss Carrie Steinmetz. First inscription dated February 14, 1884. Several penciled drawings, one is a detailed drawing of pansies and a cross signed "Allie," opposite an inscription from Alice Blood. Inscriptions in English and German, most from Independence, Iowa.

SERIES III: DONATIONS OF MRS. DYE

The following three albums were apparently donated by Neva Ruth Dye (Mrs. L. M. Dye) of Independence, Iowa. In a letter found with the collection, Mrs. Dye says she is donating "these albums" (more than one), but no albums are marked as having been donated by her. All the other albums, with the exception of the loose album pages, either have known donors or were marked as having been donated anonymously. So, it is likely that these three unmarked albums, all German-American and all with entries from Independence, Iowa, were donated by Mrs. Dye.

These albums are from the same location and period as the albums donated by Mrs. Craig and have many signatures in common with them.

- ITEM 9 Zinn, Pauline, dark red leather album, 1879
A 7 x 4.25-in. dark red album embossed with gold and silver drawing of pheasants and Chinese calligraphy on the spine belonging to Miss Pauline Zinn. The earliest inscription is from Independence, Iowa, dated April 3, 1879. Inscriptions in English and German. No donor noted, probably Mrs. Dye.
- ITEM 10 Zinn, Pauline, "Floral Album," 1879
A 7 x 4.25-in. red, cloth-bound album belonging to Miss Pauline Zinn, earliest entry from Independence, Iowa, dated April 7, 1879. Cover inscription in gold, "Floral Album." Inside are color illustrations of flowers. Inscriptions in English and German. No donor noted, probably Mrs. Dye.
- ITEM 11 Wackerbarth, Carrie, 1891
A 7.75 x 5-in. dark red, paper-bound album with gold embossed cover featuring a color lithograph of a woman with a parasol. Inscriptions are addressed to Carrie Wackerbarth. Earliest inscription dated March 10, 1891, Independence, Iowa. Inscriptions in English and German. No donor noted. The inscription signed "your sister Neva" gives reason to believe this album was donated by Mrs. Dye.

SERIES IV: INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

- ITEM 12 Album pages, 1843
One set of 9 unattached 6 x 7.5-in. album pages containing poetry and printed pictures. Anonymous donation. Two circular cutouts of illustrations are among the pages. These pages appear to be from the same album. One poem is addressed to "Sarah." The earliest inscription is marked "Norwich, Oct. 2nd, 1843." No other locations are given. Inscriptions in English.

SERIES IV: INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

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- ITEM 13 Deatherage, Dora, 1880
A 5.5 x 3-in. dark red album embossed with silver, belonging to Dora Deatherage. Inscription in the front dated October 9, 1880, reads, "Presented to Miss Dora Deatherage by Cecil L. Rogers, Waverly, Illinois." Some later entries are addressed to "Mrs. Rogers." The donor is unknown but may have been the owner or a relative. The postmarked envelope, with a return address in Springfield, Illinois, was included with the album, which Dr. Emrich marked "no name." Inscriptions in English.
- ITEM 14 Theis, Ethel Anna, 1868
A 7 x 4-in. brown, cloth-bound "Scenery Album" with silver embossed cover donated by Ethel Anna Theis of Minier, Illinois. Inscription inside front cover reads, "This album belonged to my mother, Anna Aretta Lee Robertson (Theis). Aug. 8, 1868; April 30, 1942. Ethel Anna Theis, Minier, Illinois." Earliest inscription dated June 27, 1881. Inscriptions in English.
- ITEM 15 Danforth, Nettie Browning, 1882
A 7 x 8.25-in. dark red album embossed with gold and silver, belonging to Nettie Browning Danforth of Charleston, Missouri. Dated August 29, 1882. Notations of births and deaths of Danforth relatives noted inside front cover. Notes by signatures indicate relationship to the owner, dates of death, and comments about the person: "Lived to over 100 years old. Brilliant to the end," and so on. Includes a few drawings, one photograph. Two pages pasted together conceal texts on both. Donated by Grace D. Danforth of Charleston, Missouri, in 1955. Inscriptions primarily in English, with one inscription in Greek.
- ITEM 16 Harper, Samuel A., 1883
A 3.75 x 2.5-in. dark red album with a raised and embossed cover in gold and pink showing a vase of flowers, belonging to Samuel A. Harper of Merrit Island, Florida, inscribed "Sammie Harper, Bronson, Mich." Earliest inscription dated December 26, 1883. Donated by Mr. Harper in 1955. Inscriptions in English.
- ITEM 17 Epstein, Clara, 1893
A 6.5 x 4.5-in. album originally belonging to Miss Clara Epstein from Aurora, Indiana, dated October 16, 1893, donated by H. Speier. Brown leather cover in poor condition. Inscriptions in English.
- ITEM 18 Smith, Anne M. S., 1901
A 7.5 x 9-in. blue, cloth-bound album embossed with gold, with mauve and green flower design. Titled "Forget-Me-Not: A Floral Album." Several inscription locations indicate they were collected in Northern Germany. One page near the center of the album is glued over another. Examination on a light table shows a slightly risqué verse beneath. Earliest inscription, July 13, 1901. Donated by the original owner, Anne M. S. Smith of New York, New York. Inscriptions in English and German.
- ITEM 19 Brett, Marie Helen, 1909
A 6.5 x 4.25-in. album with brown velvet binding and plastic lithographed cover, dated February 22, 1909. "Marie Helen Brett" is written on the back page; perhaps the name of the owner. The inscriptions are also addressed to "May" or "Mae." Donated by James Reilly, dated 1909. Inscriptions in English.

SERIES IV: INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

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ITEM 20

Dubois, Paula S. (Mrs. George W.), 1923

A 3.75 x 5.5-in. booklet-style greeting card from Paula S. (Mrs. George W.) Dubois of Highmount, New York. She notes it was given to her in 1923. Inscriptions in English.