

Siegfried Weisberger papers

Ms. Coll. 1377

Finding aid prepared by Sam Allingham.

Last updated on July 14, 2020.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 February 7

Table of Contents

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	4
Scope and Contents.....	4
Administrative Information.....	5
Related Materials	5
Controlled Access Headings.....	6
Collection Inventory.....	7
Series I: Correspondence.....	7
Series II: Weisberger material.....	10
Series III: Mencken material.....	11

Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Weisberger, Siegfried, 1896-1984
Title	Siegfried Weisberger papers
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1377
Date [bulk]	1923-1955
Date [inclusive]	1708-1955
Extent	4 linear feet (4 boxes)
Language	English
Language Note	The bulk of this collection is in English, but there is also a significant amount of German.
Abstract	This collection includes material collected by Siegfried Weisberger (1896-1984), proprietor of the Peabody Book Shop in Baltimore Maryland and confidante of H.L. Mencken (1880-1956), a noted writer, editor, and social provocateur, famous for his disdain for common morals and received wisdom. The collection contains correspondence between the two men and other correspondents of the Peabody Book Shop, manuscripts and published writings by and about Mencken (many of them signed), and autobiographical writings and poems written by Weisberger.

Cite as:

Siegfried Weisberger papers, 1708-1955 (bulk: 1923-1954) Ms. Coll. 1377, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Siegfried Wiesberger was the proprietor of the Peabody Book Shop, a fixture in the Baltimore intellectual scene in the first half of the 20th century, and a friend of many Baltimore writers, including H.L. Mencken. He was born in Bielitz, Austria in 1895, and came to the United States in 1912. After several years' travel in California and Hawaii, he began work at the Peabody Book Shop, under the management of his brother, Hugo, in 1922. In 1931, Hugo died, and Weisberger took over as the shop's owner. Having discovered H.L. Mencken's books at sale for a discount in a drugstore window in 1928, Weisberger sent the author a letter, suggesting his bookstore might be a more fitting place to show his wares. Mencken eventually agreed, and a lifelong friendship between the two men began, during which they shared their disdain for the shallow materialism of American culture. Weisberger sold the shop in 1954, declaring "the age of the boob is upon us," and retired to a farm in New Windsor, Maryland. He moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1974, and died in 1984.

Henry Louis (H.L.) Mencken was a noted writer, editor, and social provocateur, famous for his disdain for common morals and received wisdom. Born in Baltimore in 1881, Mencken graduated from the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute at age 15, after which he worked days at his father's cigar factory and nights at the *Baltimore Morning Herald*. He became city editor of the *Herald* in 1903; and by 1906, he managed the Sunday edition of the *Baltimore Sun*. His theatre writing for the *Sun* led him to write *George Bernard Shaw—His Plays*, which won him the attention of New York literary circles and a position as literary critic for *The Smart Set*, the city's leading cultural periodical. From 1914 to 1923, Mencken also helped edit this magazine with his friend and fellow drama critic George Jean Nathan, with whom he later started *The American Mercury*, a cultural magazine which flourished for over a decade. In the 1930s and 40s, Mencken's social criticism fell out of favor, and his study of American English became the focus of his career. From 1919 to 1948, he published several editions and supplements to his linguistic work *The American Language* (1919, revised 1921, 1923, supplemented 1945, 1948). In addition, he wrote an autobiography in three volumes: *Happy Days* (1940), *Newspaper Days* (1941), and *Heathen Days*. Mencken was also known for his participation as a prosecutor in the Scopes Trial in 1925. He died on January 29, 1956, in the Baltimore row home where he had lived most of his life.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes material collected by Siegfried Weisberger, proprietor of the Peabody Book Shop in Baltimore Maryland. The collection is separated into three series. The first series contains correspondence between H.L. Mencken and Weisberger, as well as other correspondence concerning Weisberger's personal life and the day-to-day activities of the Peabody Book Shop. The second series contains autobiographical writing and poems by Weisberger, as well as a small number of receipts, lists, and photographs of authors from the Book Shop. The third series contains material related to H.L. Mencken, including manuscripts, published material by and about Mencken (much of it signed), and pictures of Mencken. More information is available at the series level.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

Copyright restrictions may exist. For most library holdings, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania do not hold copyright. It is the responsibility of the requester to seek permission from the holder of the copyright to reproduce material from the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Source of Acquisition

Sold by Siegfried Weisberger, 1957.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At Johns Hopkins University:

H.L. Mencken collection, 1900-1996

At New York Public Library:

H.L. Mencken papers, 1905-1956, MssCol 1962

At the University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts:

Theodore Dreiser papers, circa 1890-1965 (bulk: 1897-1955), Ms. Coll. 30

Burton Rascoe papers, 1890-1957 (bulk: 1920-1957), Ms. Coll. 1145

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Peabody Book Shop.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Autobiographies
- Correspondence
- Poems
- Writings (documents)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Mencken, H.L. (Henry Louis), 1880-1956

SUBJECT(S)

- American literature--20th century
- Authors
- Authors, American
- Book collectors
- Book industries and trade
- Booksellers and bookselling
- Business
- Emigration and immigration
- Literature

Collection Inventory

SERIES I: CORRESPONDENCE, 1925-1954.

Scope and Contents note

This series contains correspondence from H.L. Mencken (as well as those writing on his behalf, including his brother, August Mencken, and his secretary, Rosalind Lohrfink) to Siegfried Weisberger. This correspondence is predominately professional, related to sales of Mencken's work at the Peabody Book Shop, but it also contains personal asides about Weisberger's personality and ideas, as well as their shared contempt for modern society. The series also includes correspondence received at the Peabody Book Shop, most of which is commercial in nature, though with personal touches; there are letters related to pursuing delinquent accounts, requests for rare manuscripts, and bemoaning the low state of the book trade. In addition, there are carbon copies and drafts of letters written by Weisberger to both commercial and personal correspondents, including Mencken. These carbons are often fragile.

CORRESPONDENCE FROM MENCKEN TO WEISBERGER, WITH SOME CORRESPONDENCE FROM AUGUST MENCKEN AND ROSALIND LOHRFINK.

	Box	Folder
1925-1932.	1	1
1933-1940.	1	2
1942-1944.	1	3
1945.	1	4
1946.	1	5
1947 January-July.	1	6

1947 August-December.	1	7
1948 January-May.	1	8
1948 June-December.	1	9
1949.	1	10
1950-1956, undated.	1	11

CORRESPONDENCE TO THE PEABODY BOOK SHOP.

	Box	Folder
Abbe - Austrian Legation, 1931-1954.	1	12
Bach Choir - Byrnes, 1937-1954.	1	13
Cairns - Cutler, 1934-1954.	1	14
Dairyland's Progressive Acres - Dwight, 1926-1954.	1	15
Earle - Evers, 1931-1954.	1	16
Falk - Futterman, 1930-1954.	1	17
Gallardo - Guzik, 1931-1954.	1	18
Hacker - Huntington, 1934-1954.	1	19
Iago - Justus, 1932-1954.	1	20
Kaminsky - Kurlano, 1943-1954.	1	21
Lane - Lura, 1931-1954.	1	22

MacCampbell - Myers, 1935-1954.	1	23
National Gallery of Art - Purdy, 1932-1954.	1	24
Radziszewski - Ryan, 1932-1954.	1	25
Safe Deposit and Trust Company - Swedish Embassy of Washington D.C., 1931-1954.	2	1
Taylor - Volman, 1919-1954.	2	2
Wagner - Zysser, 1931-1954.	2	3
Unknown sender, 1940-1952.	2	4

CORRESPONDENCE FROM WEISBERGER TO OTHERS.

	Box	Folder
Abbe - Azrael, 1950-1954.	2	5
Baedenkopf - Buschatke, 1950-1954.	2	6
C and P Telephone Company - Curtis Candy Company, 1937-1954.	2	7
F.H.D. - Duntons, 1931-1952.	2	8
Eastern News Company - Export Book Company, 1950-1954.	2	9
F. - Fulton, 1950-1954.	2	10
Gaddis - Guyton, 1945-1954.	2	11
Hacker - Huppman, 1940-1953.	2	12
Intelligence - Jones, 1947-1953.	2	13

K and L Iron Works - Kurland, 1950-1954.	2	14
Laderach - Lykouris, 1949-1954.	2	15
Macaulay - August Mencken, 1944-1955.	2	16
H.L. Mencken - Murray, 1944-1955.	2	17
National Geographic Society - Purdy, 1948-1953.	2	18
Rabey - Ryschik, 1950-1954.	2	19
Safe Deposit and Trust Company - Symington, 1950-1954.	2	20
Tall - Voigt, 1949-1954.	2	21
Walker - Zweig, unknown recipients, 1939-1954.	2	22

SERIES II: WEISBERGER MATERIAL.

Scope and Contents note

This series contains autobiographical writing and personal, unpublished poems by Siegfried Weisberger. It also contains a limited amount of bookstore ephemera, such as lists, receipts, and a small collection of signatures of authors, musicians, and composers, including John Philip Souza.

WRITINGS BY WEISBERGER.

	Box	Folder
Autobiographical writings, undated.	3	1
Notes and assorted manuscript pages, 1949-1952.	3	2

Published articles, 1936.	3	3
Poems, 1949-1956, undated.	3	4-5

MATERIALS FROM THE PEABODY BOOK SHOP.

	Box	Folder
Inventory lists, invoices, and receipts, 1949-1952.	3	6
Photos and signatures of authors, 1925-1954.	3	7

SERIES III: MENCKEN MATERIAL.

Scope and Contents note

This series contains manuscript copies of Mencken's autobiographical work, *Happy Days* (1940), *Newspaper Days* (1941), and *Heathen Days*. It also includes published writing by Mencken (much of it signed), writing by others related to Mencken and his ancestors, and photographs of Mencken.

WRITINGS BY MENCKEN.

	Box	Folder
Edited typescript of <i>Happy Days</i> , including supplementary material, circa 1940.	3	8-11
Edited typescript of <i>Heathen Days</i> , circa 1943.	3	12-13
Edited typescript of <i>Newspaper Days</i> , including supplementary material, circa 1941.	3	14-16

Articles by Mencken which were included in <i>the American Language</i> , 1914-1948, undated.	4	1-6
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Published writings by Mencken, 1914-1943.	4	7
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Published writings by Mencken, 1944-1954.	4	8
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PAMPHLETS BY OTHERS RELATED TO MENCKEN AND HIS ANCESTORS.

	Box	Folder
1708-1917.	4	9
1920-1926.	4	10
1926-1945.	4	11
1946-1966.	4	12
Promotion for Mencken books, 1923-1960.	4	13

PHOTOS OF MENCKEN.

	Box	Folder
Photos of Mencken, 1923 - circa 1955.	4	14
Correspondence regarding Mencken portraits between Weisberger and Nikol Schattenstein, 1949-1951.	4	15
Envelopes that contained signed photos of Mencken, 1923-1954.	4	16-17