

August Mencken papers

Ms. Coll. 1144

Finding aid prepared by Zach Fruit and Cory Knudsen.

Last updated on January 14, 2016.

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

2015 November 5

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Mencken, August, 1889-1967
Title	August Mencken papers
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1144
Date [bulk]	1940-1961
Date [inclusive]	1931-1972
Extent	0.33 linear feet (1 box and 1 oversize folder)
Language	English
Abstract	August Mencken (1889-1967) was an American civil engineer and author. This collection comprises August Mencken's correspondence regarding his brother, H.L. Mencken, his research and work on a scale model of the Confederate cruiser <i>Alabama</i> , and miscellaneous collected writings from friends and colleagues.

Biography/History

August Mencken (1889-1967) was an American civil engineer and author. He was the younger brother of author H.L. (Henry Louis) Mencken and the son of cigar magnate August Mencken, Sr. According to the

William Feather Magazine in 1954, August Mencken was a "constant companion of his famous brother ... during the latter's long illness," (page 2). Indeed, biographies of H.L. Mencken indicate an extraordinarily close relationship between the two brothers.

Born on February 18, 1889, to August (1854-1899) and Anna Margaret (1858-1925) Mencken, August Mencken was raised in Baltimore, Maryland. He worked as a civil engineer for Claiborne Johnston in Baltimore in 1917 and for Whitman Requandt and Smith in 1942. He appears to have lived most of his life with his brother, H.L. Mencken.

August Mencken spent more than six years building a model of the CSS *Alabama* which he intended to gift to his brother's wife, Sara Haardt Mencken. The model was finished only after her death; therefore, he donated it to the United States Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, Maryland. In addition to building the model, Mencken performed significant research on the ship's history during the Civil War and its sinking by the USS *Kearsarge* off the coast of Cherbourg, France, in 1864. He compiled his research and correspondence into a booklet, eight copies of which were made. He appears to have been very proud of the model and his booklet, sending copies of the booklet to naval officers, libraries, and even the President of the United States.

In addition to his interest in ships and engineering, Mencken also wrote several books, including *First-Class Passenger* in 1938, *By the Neck; A Book of Hangings* in 1942, *The Railroad Passenger Car; An Illustrated History of the First Hundred Years* in 1957, *The Fair Chanteuse, or Science is Here to Stay* in 1958, *The Reluctant Bride; A Romance* in 1960, and *Designing and Building the Great Pyramid* in 1963.

August Mencken died on May 19, 1967.

Scope and Contents

This collection comprises August Mencken's correspondence regarding his brother, H.L. Mencken, his research and work on a scale model of the Confederate cruiser *Alabama*, and miscellaneous collected writings from friends and colleagues. The collection is arranged in three series: documents concerning H.L. Mencken; CSS *Alabama*, notes and documents; and writings by others.

The series including documents concerning H.L. Mencken contains a small amount of material collected by August Mencken about his brother. This series includes published material by H.L. Mencken including "Notes on American Given-names" and "Gropings in Literary Darkness," as well as a volume and a letter produced as a result of H.L. Mencken's role as editor of *The American Mercury*. Several posthumous accounts of Mencken's life are contained in this series, but of particular interest may be the description of H.L. Mencken's relationship with the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. A description of the Mencken brothers' home following August's death may be found in Drawer 55. Three letters written to August about his brother are from S. Miles Bouton, Stewart H. Holbrook, and Ben Dixon MacNeill. There are, in addition, several newspaper clippings regarding a play entitled *An Unpleasant Evening with H.L. Mencken*, starring David Wayne which was performed at Ford's Theater in 1972.

The second series documents August Mencken's research of and booklet regarding the CSS *Alabama*. Of interest is August Mencken's extensive correspondence with Naval officers and experts on the *Alabama*, as well as blueprints and photographs of the *Alabama*.

The final series includes writings by others, in particular, Robert Durr. Many of these reprints appear to have been sent to August Mencken by the authors. The topics are widely varied, including engineering, history, literature, medicine, nature, and ships' models. All the articles written by Durr relate to literature.

Researchers should be aware that there is one piece of writing by August Mencken in Box 1, Folder 11 ("The Descent of Man") as well as a brief profile of him in Box 1, Folder 2.

The bulk of the collection relates to the CSS *Alabama* and August Mencken's research and writing on the ship. Mencken's booklet on the ship appears to have been a source of great pride for him. Researchers interested in naval history and/or H.L. Mencken would benefit from consulting this collection.

Administrative Information

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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.

Custodial History note

Gift of August Mencken, via his will, circa 1972.

Processing Information note

Students from English 771.301, Behind the Reference Desk: Archival Methods, Forms, Theory processed this collection as part of their course work during the Fall 2015 semester. The course is taught by Jean-Christophe Cloutier, Assistant Professor of English.

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Alabama (Screw sloop)#.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Photographs
- Writings (document genre)

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations

PERSONAL NAME(S)

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

SUBJECT(S)

- Authors, American--20th century

Collection Inventory

SERIES 1. DOCUMENTS CONCERNING H.L. MENCKEN.

	Box	Folder
Mencken, H.L., published material, 1943, 1946.	1	1
Mencken, H.L., profiles of, 1954-1972.	1	2 1
Letters to August concerning H.L. Mencken, 1937, 1958.	1	3
<i>An unpleasant evening with H.L. Mencken</i> , clippings and article regarding, 1972.	1	4

SERIES 2. CSS ALABAMA, NOTES AND DOCUMENTS.

	Box	Folder
CSS <i>Alabama</i> , correspondence regarding, 1942, 1959-1961.	1	5
CSS <i>Alabama</i> , research and clippings regarding, circa 1942-1961.	1	6
CSS <i>Alabama</i> ship captains, photograph and letter regarding, 1931.	1	7
A. Mencken's model of CSS <i>Alabama</i> , photograph and receipt, circa 1942-1961.	1	8

Ship model photographs, not CSS <i>Alabama</i> , circa 1942-1943.	1	9
CSS <i>Alabama</i> booklet written by August Mencken, correspondence and copyright notice, 1936, 1942-1943, 1961.	1	10

SERIES 3. WRITINGS BY OTHERS.

	Box	Folder
Articles, poems, and reprints, including correspondence, 1940-1942, 1957-1965.	1	11
Durr, Robert, inscribed reprints and correspondence, 1956-1960.	1	12